

THE HAPPY TOWER



Grace Irwin



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THE HAPPY TOWER

By
Grace Irwin

LITTLE MISS REDHEAD
UNDER SUMMER SKIES
ALMOST FIFTEEN



Grace Brown.

Peter and Cynthia could be relied upon to imagine almost anything fantastic.

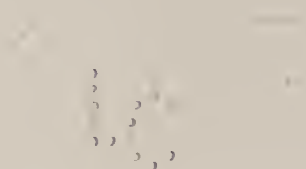
The Happy Tower

By

Grace Irwin

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Pictures by the Author



Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Company

Boston

1940

New York

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Once upon a time I knew a big family of children very much like the children in this book. They, too, had devoted parents—a lively father and a wise mother. Yes, and there was a brave grandmother. Curiously enough, they also had a faithful Delia!

To them all, I lovingly dedicate this book, and I thank them for the happy memories they have left with me.

Grace Irwin

~ Contents ~

I. EXCITING NEWS	13
II. HOUSE HUNTING	29
III. THERMOMETERS	45
IV. A LOST FATHER	72
V. COUNTRY LIFE	95
VI. RABBITS	126
VII. NEW FRIENDS	167
VIII. TURTLES AND TADPOLES	193
IX. GREEN WATERMELONS	209
X. TWO LETTERS	226
XI. HIDDEN TREASURE	238
XII. OLD-LADY-WITCH	246
XIII. SAUCERS OF MILK	270
XIV. GRANDMA'S SECRET	289



Cynthia

I

~ *Exciting News* ~

IT was altogether fitting that the new baby should be called Patricia, for hadn't she arrived into this world one very bright and beautiful Saint Patrick's Day morning? But it must be truthfully and regretfully admitted at once, that her name fitted her far better than she herself and her two brothers and two sisters fitted into the Abbott's apartment. For a long time, that apartment had seemed too small for four children, and at the advent of the fifth, it positively overflowed and bulged.

But Cynthia, who was only eight on the morning Patty was born, did not share the worries of Mr. and Mrs. Abbott about the size of the apartment. She

felt that having a sister born on Saint Patrick's Day, who was to be called Patricia, was "exciting news," "odd news," as they so often called it on the radio.

Certainly she must let people know about it at once and without delay! "Let's go downstairs and tell Mr. O'Rourke!" she said, grabbing Judy by one plump arm. Judy was four and a half. "Let's tell him about Patricia being born on Saint Patrick's day. If we don't tell him right away, he'll think we have a cat up here, instead of a baby. She sounds like a cat!"

Judy was delighted. She liked to go down into the O'Rourke's apartment, in the "cellar" as she called it. For Mr. O'Rourke was the superintendent of their apartment building and he lived in the basement. He was fat and ruddy and *almost* always good-natured. He liked to pull her funny little pig tails and tell her that her eyes were like two blue lakes in Killarney (wherever Killarney was Judy had no idea—nor even what it was)!

"Let's!" And Judy ran toward the door. "Let's tell him. He will think she's only a cat if we don't. I did. She squeals like one," Judy was very often a poll-parrot, to Cynthia's annoyance.

Cynthia intended to do the telling, however, for she liked nothing better except, perhaps, to hear "news" in the first place. But it was Judy who achieved it, even before they arrived at the

O'Rourke's. She shouted it through the door of the elevator before Tom, the elevator boy, had had time to open it. She shouted it at the new door man who was already her mortal enemy, the crossdest man she had ever known. She shouted it at the postman, and at Mrs. Parks, who lived on the first floor and who was just leaving to walk her dog. Mrs. Parks was, if possible, an even worse crank than the new door man who was-the-worst-crank-anyone-ever-heard of!

"Judy Abbott, let *me* tell it next," Cynthia ordered, feeling cheated. "Let me tell Mr. O'Rourke first. It was my idea, anyway."

Judy nodded. But Judy couldn't keep anything to herself for even a second. She had not meant to tell the other people. Indeed, she hadn't! It had just burst out.

When they reached Mr. O'Rourke's door, Cynthia turned and faced her small sister.

"Now remember, Judy. *I* am going to tell Mr. O'Rourke. And if you tell him first I'll never let you come with me again when I am telling things. It's not fair." She spoke very firmly.

Judy bobbed her head up and down in violent agreement.

"All right, Cynthia, you tell him! You tell him first—"

But before Judy finished, Mr. O'Rourke's door

opened and Mr. O'Rourke came out. So of course Judy had to finish her sentence!

"—About Patricia's being born on S-Saint P-Patrick's Day!" she sputtered.

So it was that Mr. O'Rourke heard Judy finish her sentence. And once again Cynthia did not have the joy of being the first to impart "odd news" and "exciting news."

Mr. O'Rourke's face broke into a broad grin.

"Glory be—now you don't say! What beautiful news!" He stepped back into the doorway again, and shouted lustily, "Mother! Come quick this minute. Hear this grand news, these two proud little girls have to tell this beautiful Saint Patrick's Day morning!"

"Girls!" Cynthia thought a little crossly. "He means just Judy. I never once told it first."

"Come in! Come in!" Mr. O'Rourke invited them, with a large sweep of his arms. Then he put one big paw of a hand on Cynthia's shoulder and one on Judy's and led them into the apartment.

"My goodness! My! My!" Mrs. O'Rourke kept saying over and over. "Think of it! A Patricia born on Saint Patrick's Day. Just think of it. She will be blessed all of her days, I feel sure. Just you two sit down and wait a bit. I'll give you a handful of little green candies to celebrate. They are for my party tonight."

Cynthia and Judy needed no second invitation. If the truth were known, it was what they fully expected might happen. They had not, of course, been able to guess that the color of the candies might be an appropriate *green*—but they had been more than hopeful, when they started downstairs, that there would be candies.

Cynthia sat herself primly on the edge of a chair, and felt very important. Her gray eyes were bright and glowing, and she had quite forgotten that Judy had spoiled her fun at being the first to tell the “news.”

“We had to tell you, Mr. O’Rourke,” Cynthia spoke with dignity (her eyes, however, still on the door through which Mrs. O’Rourke would appear with those handfuls of candy). “We thought if we didn’t you’d think Patricia was—”

“A cat!” Judy burst out excitedly. “She squeals like one.”

Cynthia turned her eyes from the doorway, with its visions of green Saint Patrick’s Day candies, and glared at her sister. Once more indignation swept over her. It wasn’t fair! She was eight and Judy was only four and a half. Judy should let her at least *finish* telling the news, even if she hadn’t given her a chance to begin it.

“Well, here you are, children! And my, my, aren’t you proud? Think of it—a baby sister named Patricia

born on Saint Patrick's day." And Mrs. O'Rourke let lovely, little emerald green gumdrops trickle from her big generous hands, first into Cynthia's and then into Judy's. The girls took good care to use both their hands—to make as big a cup as possible.

"Now how many of you are there?" Mrs. O'Rourke spoke as though to herself. "Let me see—there's the baby boy, Michael—he's two—then you, Judy—then David, he must be six. And Cynthia's eight! Five in all, including this grand new one. Three girls—two boys—beautiful!"

"Judy isn't the baby any more," Cynthia commented as she eyed her sister. Judy wouldn't like her saying that, but she didn't care.

"I hope you won't be leaving us or moving away from that apartment now there are five children," Mr. O'Rourke said, as though he meant it from the bottom of his heart. Which he did at the minute, because it was a beautiful bright Saint Patrick's Day and he felt very kindly toward the whole world. Tomorrow he might not mean it at all. Children could be pesky, as well he knew, and five children in one apartment was an alarming thought.

He smiled as he said goodbye, putting one of his big hands on Cynthia's lovely head of light brown curls, and pulling one of Judy's stubby little braids of yellow hair. "Now be sure to tell your mother for me that Patricia is going to be blessed. She will

have the curls of Cynthia and the two blue Killarney Lakes for eyes like Judy here. The top of the morning to you!"

In no time at all, or so it seemed to Mr. and Mrs. Abbott, little Patty was toddling—and then running and skipping. In fact, she was over three years old. And of course, three and a half years had also been added to Cynthia's, David's, Judy's and Michael's ages. They were now eleven, nine, seven and a half and five. And the entire Abbott family, all seven of them, still lived in the apartment, in which Patty had been born. The apartment had not grown one bit bigger—in fact, it really hadn't changed its size at all. But it *seemed*—oh so very, very much smaller!

Every Sunday morning now, Mrs. Abbott laid away the sections of the Sunday newspapers whose pages were labeled *Real Estate*. And while her five children lay flat on their stomachs in the middle of the living room absorbed into a breathless, rare quiet over the "funnies," she read up and down long columns with an increasingly heavy heart. Yes, she had to admit, they must begin to make plans for moving into the country. But what would it be like? She had never lived out of the city in her life.

There was one other person in the apartment, who was doing a great deal of gloomy thinking about the possibility of moving—Delia. Delia had come to the

Abbotts over eleven years ago, just before Cynthia was born. She had never lived with any other family in America but the Abbotts. And she, too, loved the city. She was used to it, and what was of far more importance, her only friends in America worked for people in a nearby apartment. She felt she would be lost, miserable and lonely outside of the city. And the more she considered the possibility, the more certain she was that she preferred going back to Ireland on the next boat rather than risk it.

“Sure and that’s what I’ll do!” Delia informed Patty, who was standing on a chair beside the ironing board, watching the shining, silvery iron go swiftly, skillfully up and down, in and out of her own small dress. “Sure, and I will that, I will go right back to the old country.” Delia’s brogue was, even after eleven years, rich and thick.

Patty clutched her doll, “Winkie Blinkie,” very tight. Winkie Blinkie had been so christened when she was young and lovely and had two bright eyes that winked and blinked. Now she had only one eye, and it neither winked nor blinked but stared glassily straight ahead. Patty’s own hazel eyes, too, were solemn, as she bobbed her head up and down in agreement with Delia’s announcement.

“Go back to the old country,” she repeated with a brogue, at the moment nearly as thick as Delia’s own. Mrs. Abbott was often a little alarmed at the

brogue with which her baby so frequently spoke. But Mr. Abbott thought it the funniest thing in the world. He would roar with laughter, when Patty asked for "tin cints," instead of "ten cents!" In fact, from sheer delight he was ready to reward her with the "tin cints," when she asked for it.

Delia at this moment was dragging Patty's dress off the ironing board, with a determined jerk. Make no mistake about it, if she was going to the country, it would be the *old* country. No new one for her! The green hills of far away Galway were in a beautiful hazy mist before her eyes, looking quite as fair and as heart-warming as they had that morning when she had said goodbye to them.

"Let me tell ye about the old country, Patty, me darlin'—" and tell her she did as she ironed Judy's dress. Patty was enthralled. She never cared much what Delia talked about to her when they were alone, so long as she talked. And they shared many a secret.

"David says he won't be eating anything with onions in it, did he?" Delia would say with a wink. "Well, we've fooled him many and many a time. Here we go again."

Or! "And yer very smart daddy says, says he, that he can't ate chocolate. It poisons him. But he can ate cocoa. So Patty, me darlin', we are putting *cocoa* frosting on the cake. We've been doing it, this long time and ye ain't fatherless yet."

Patty loved these secrets, for Delia's face was so puckered up with mischief that it made delicious little shivers go up and down her spine. Today, however, Delia's eyes were not filled with mischief. There was a strange, sweet sadness in them and Patty shared it with her. She continued to hold Winkie Blinkie close to her small warm body and nodded her head up and down like a little nodding mandarin. And she agreed from the bottom of her loyal loving heart with everything Delia said.

"You know I love ye, Patty—but Michael's me baby. I can't—" Delia wiped her arm across her eyes. Ireland was shut out. It was there before her no longer—all she saw now was a round, solemn little face with stiff, straight, sandy hair sticking up in funny little wisps from the forehead. Little sandy-haired, pug-nosed Michael was her baby—and sure, she loved him with her whole heart and soul, that she did. Could she say goodbye to him?

"Patty darlin', I am after thinking I'll be going with ye to the *new* country when you go, and not back to the old country," she spoke sadly—her expression quite woe-begone. Patty nodded her head again, her own expression quite as forlorn as Delia's. Delia's heart was touched at the wistful little face near her own. She at once reproached herself. Patty did take things to heart so!

“Sure and ye mustn’t mind if Michael’s me baby boy—ye are me baby girl. And I am not leaving ye nor the whole of ye either—no matter where ye go.” She caught Patty to her, gave her a hug and jumped her down to the floor.

It was only a very short time after this that the actual moving to the country was upon them. After all the rumblings, like thunder in the distance on a sultry day, the storm appeared directly over head. Cynthia, David, Judy and Michael had left for school, and Mr. Abbott had gone off to business (at last) after mislaying everything he wanted to take with him for the day—mislaying and finding, and mislaying all over again. And Mrs. Abbott had sat down at the breakfast table for another cup of coffee, like millions of mothers do all over the land in the city—or out of it. She had to—simply had to—catch her breath.

Then it was that Delia brought her a batch of letters which the mail man had just left. The top one was post-marked Chicago.

“Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Oh, my goodness!” Mrs. Abbott sighed after she had read it. Then she stared ahead of her in dismay and absent-mindedly removed a knife from Patty’s hand, with which her small daughter was drawing designs with furious force on the table cloth.

"Glory be to heaven!" Delia exclaimed fearfully. "Sure and what might it be? You're like a piece of paper, that white."

"It's from my mother—this letter," Mrs. Abbott faltered. She scarcely heard Delia. She was talking to herself.

"She's not passed on?" Delia cheerfully suggested the worst—to have it over with promptly. "Poor Mis' Wilton. Poor Peter will miss her. The poor lad."

"She hardly would be *writing* me that she had died—" Mrs. Abbott smiled faintly.

"It can't be Peter himself, could it now? Your mother would be broken-hearted that she would—after having him since he was a baby," Delia persisted, loathe to give up a tragedy. Peter was Mrs. Abbott's twelve year old nephew.

"No, Peter is very well, apparently, but also very unhappy. My mother says he is lonely at the boarding school where she sent him. His letters are pathetic. He doesn't complain—" she added hastily, lest Delia condemn Peter for whining. "It's just that his letters come too often, and are much, much too loving. That is what is worrying her."

"Worrying her—" Delia echoed as she disentangled Patty from the cord on the coffee percolator.

"You know, Delia!" her mistress now continued, "twelve year old boys never really *like* writing letters

—they have to be driven to doing it. Yet Peter is writing Mother every other day—and in every letter he tells how good and kind she’s been to him, and how much he loves her, and that he’s going to grow up and make lots of money for her some day, so she will never have to work again. Of course, this is worrying Mother to death—she knows he is not happy—”

“Glory be—!” Delia’s face was blank as the side of the wall. This didn’t make sense. Fancy worrying one’s head off—because a boy said he loved you, every other day! And she leaned over and grabbed Patty’s hands which were now hovering over the electric toaster.

“The child is possessed upon destroying herself this morning!” she stormed. “Sure, and she gets mornings like this every so often. I am expecting any day now to find her crawling into the oven with the roast beef.”

“Yes—!” Mrs. Abbott’s mind was far removed from Patty. Anyway if Patty did crawl into the oven, Delia would be on hand to save her. She could count on Delia in any emergency about the house—from finding her pocket book (which she mislaid at an average of twice an hour all day) to rescuing her children in any crisis. Once each day she said to herself, “What on earth would I do without Delia?”

“Delia!” Mrs. Abbott burst out suddenly after a

few minutes of silence. "Delia, it's come at last, there's no escaping from it now."

"*Escaping*, from what?" Delia's eyes opened wide with some alarm but more hope. Perhaps, after all, this letter of Mrs. Abbott's would have some really exciting or distressing news. It had seemed so at first, and it would be too bad if it fell flat in the end. "Escape" was a word that was always linked with some calamity, even if past.

"Peter will have to come and live with us—and we will have to move, Delia!" Mrs. Abbott paused, then went on slowly and deliberately, "We will have to move out of the city. Into the country, Delia." Delia nodded her head. "Sure and that ye will—the whole of ye! I have seen that coming this long time now."

"Six children couldn't live happily in this apartment—they just couldn't—" Mrs. Abbott went on, as though Delia hadn't spoken.

"That they couldn't!" Delia spoke emphatically. "And if you should ask me, five of them is making a holy horror of it right now. That new superintendent was complaining to me this very morning about Michael." Delia's eyes snapped. "Michael—the poor baby, no less! He left his little velocipede for one minute in the doorway, and that Mr. Arnold on the sixth floor picks that very minute to go stone blind, and he fell over it. Sure, from one end of the day to the other it's complaints, first this, then

that—! Get out of the city, I say, and good riddance to it.” Delia’s heart was a little heavy, but it was loyal and stout. She could see Mrs. Abbott had no choice whatsoever, and she would stand by her no matter what pang it might cost her.

“I could never refuse my mother anything, Delia—not anything. She only ‘hoped’ it would be possible for me to take Peter—but she says she knows it would be impossible—”

“Not at all, at all! Sure, and ye should write her at once, that ye were thinking this long time of moving to the country, and ye want Peter—what’s one more child more or less, when ye have five.”

Mrs. Abbott looked full into Delia’s loyal face, and felt a lump in her throat. “That’s good of you, Delia!” she cried, swallowing hard against the lump. “What ever would I do without you!”

“Do without me!” Delia cried out appalled. “Ye will never go without me. I’ve been thinking this long while, how I’d like the country. I could turn the children loose out of doors—sure they wouldn’t be under me feet all day. When’s Peter coming?” she went on brusquely.

Mrs. Abbott smiled faintly.

“I will have to speak to Mr. Abbott about it. I—” she hesitated. “Oh, I don’t know what he will say—” she added hurriedly.

“I know what he ought to be saying,” Delia put

in promptly. Delia never hesitated when it came to expressing her opinion.

Mrs. Abbott laughed. Delia did rule them all!

“Oh, Mr. Abbott himself, I think, like you, Delia, has been feeling this long time that we will have to leave the city.”

Delia nodded emphatically. “Whenever Peter came here to stay a few days, him and Judy was forever into a squabble. This apartment is too small for the likes of them. They need a broad, wide, green, open stretch of fields.”

Mrs. Abbott laughed lightly. How easily it was coming to be now—this thought of the “country.”

“It is below Peter’s sense of importance and twelve-year-old dignity to be bossed all over the place by a small seven-and-a-half-year-old—and a girl at that!”

“And Judy’s going to be boss—no matter what. Sure, she’s bringing up the family—”

“Cynthia will be delighted—she and Peter love to show off to each other how much they read and how much they know—” Mrs. Abbott was actually feeling almost light-hearted. “Oh, Delia, maybe this is the happiest news I’ve had in a long time and maybe it will all turn out for the best—”

“Sure, and it will that,” Delia agreed sturdily, her own heart not growing lighter, but heavier now that leaving the city was upon them, without a doubt. “It’s the right and sensible thing ye be doing, and make no mistake about it.”



David

II

~ House Hunting ~

“Now I want you to be very good and very quiet tonight at the table—that is if you want to eat in the dining room with Daddy and me—otherwise you will be sent right out to the kitchen to eat. I have a very, very important matter to talk over with Daddy—and I don’t want him too tired to hear it properly,” Mrs. Abbott warned solemnly.

It had been a long established custom in the Abbott household to break important or distressing news to Mr. Abbott after he had his dinner. The children were always warned not to meet him at the door shouting calamities. The “news” was always given to him gently later on, once he had peacefully and happily

settled himself into his own particular chair for the evening—for a pleasant and restful evening—with his family.

Five pairs of eyes were fastened on their mother's face. Patty bobbed her head up and down vigorously. She knew that her mother's tone meant something that was very serious. The other four felt this too, but each one was also a little worried. Cynthia and Judy were wondering if it was about the woman on the first floor who had that very afternoon asked them for *goodness* sake couldn't they find anywhere in the whole city to roller skate but up and down and up and down in front of *her* windows? David remembered now, all too painfully, that he had actually shouted defiance at the door man, who had asked him please to be a little more quiet. He knew with a leaden feeling that this was a very serious matter to his parents. As for Michael—it had taken him almost all day to recover from the crash, clatter and uproar when Mr. Arnold had fallen over his velocipede. Michael didn't understand the actual words that Mr. Arnold had hurled at him at the top of the loudest voice that one could imagine, but there was no mistaking their terrible and awful meaning.

That night Mr. Abbott sat down at the dinner table with a sinking heart. What was the matter with the family? He looked up from under his heavy eye-

brows and sharply glanced up and down the table. He "counted noses"—they were all there, thank goodness, even Michael's with its everlasting bump on the end of it. Michael was always scraping off the end of his nose—usually just before he was to be shown off with the others to company. One, two, three, four, five shining faces, and well-combed heads of hair. Five mouths, which opened only to put food into them. What on earth! To top it all, the children left the dining room with Delia the minute the meal was over—without saying one single word.

"Now if that isn't enough to shatter my nervous system, what is?" he asked himself glumly. "It was never so before—but once. That was the time Michael threw my gold watch out of the window. Whatever it is tonight—it's going to be a lulu!"

"Well," he repeated and made a feeble attempt to be funny. "Well, well, it's good to sit down for the first time today."

This was to tease his wife. It was what she said, almost *every* night!

Mrs. Abbott, with only a faint smile, took out her mother's letter and read it.

"Whew—!" Mr. Abbott drew a long deep breath of fervent thankfulness, when she had finished reading. So it was only this!

"I do think we ought to take Peter to live with us. I feel we ought to—" his wife concluded in a rush.

“Of course, of course! And why not I’d like to know? The more the merrier. I always said I wanted a mob of children around me if I could afford it. Write your mother at once—and tell her to ship Peter to us on the next train—”

“We are pretty crowded in this apartment, Tom—” Mrs. Abbott spoke slowly. “And you know, we are not going to find it easy to get another one big enough for us. This one is one of the old-fashioned, big apartments, but one any bigger will be worse than old fashioned, or far, far, beyond our pocket book.”

“I heartily agree with you, my dear!” Mr. Abbott fairly roared with relief; “I am sick and tired of being cramped up in a few rooms. What a life for children!” Then quite forgetting his frequent assertion that his children were the most healthy in the city, he declared, “The poor youngsters are sickly looking and pasty. I’ve noticed it myself. Those two weeks at Sandy Beach in the summer are not enough for them. They have got to have fresh air. And I like fresh air, myself. You know that!”

“Look at Cynthia, look at her. Peaked! Pipe stem legs! Come to think of it, this apartment is good enough only for big dogs, little dogs and middle-sized dogs. And our neighbors will cordially agree, judging by the complaints. We are going to move—and we are going to move out of the city. I say, it’s fine having Peter come to live with us, he’s more like a

brother than a cousin. Makes it more even—three boys and three girls. It will just be another son. I've always liked Peter—fine little fellow!"

This was how Mr. Abbott made the decision to move away from the city. And since he never did anything by halves, there was no wavering after he once made up his mind.

"Write to your mother tomorrow morning and tell her we are going to move, and as quickly as we can. Tell her to take Peter out of that school at once. Maybe, he's being starved or badly treated—"

"I don't think it's that," Mrs. Abbott said quietly and reasonably. "Peter misses the excitement of traveling about with Mother. It was an exciting life. But he does like it here with us—because ours—" she smiled, "is also an exciting life."

Cynthia followed her mother around the next morning, it being a Saturday—from room to room, getting constantly under foot and in the way. She had so many questions to ask. Indeed, she had not gone to sleep for a long, long time the night before. She must know the answers as soon as possible, and what Cynthia wanted to know, she never hesitated to ask. She had an enormous curiosity about things. Just now, she wanted to hear more and more and more about Peter's exciting life. But Mrs. Abbott was very absent-minded—her thoughts were filled with the possibilities of moving and with Peter's arrival. She

didn't mind, however, answering Cynthia's endless questions—up to a point. So up to this point, Cynthia made the most of her questions.

“Mother, why does Peter travel with Grandma all the time? She never takes me. I'd love it!”

“Because!” Mrs. Abbott was looking frantically for the top of David's pajamas. Why must he scatter things so! “Because, you have a home, a mother and a father. Peter has no home—no mother nor a father. I am going to speak to David about his pajamas—he must stop flinging them around this way.”

“What happened to Peter's father and mother?” Cynthia persisted, although she had heard the story many times.

“Peter's father was my big brother, Peter. He was your Uncle Peter. But he was your uncle for only one year—and then he died. Peter was two years old. And his mother had died when he was only one month old. Poor little Peter.” Mrs. Abbott's eyes were misty.

Cynthia sighed deeply—and a little contentedly. It was so very sweet and sad!

“Poor Peter,” she echoed.

“Yes, Poor Peter!” Mrs. Abbott had given up the search for David's pajama tops and was looking for the mate to one of Michael's socks. “But not too poor! Grandma took him with her and made him

her little boy. She has taken the most loving care of him all these years."

"Grandma's never had a home—and so Peter's never had a home—" Cynthia was encouraging her mother to go on—

Mrs. Abbott sat down—and looked ahead of her a little sadly.

"Your grandmother's been a very, very brave woman. You will never meet any braver. You know, she brought up me and your Uncle Peter. She went on the stage years ago—thirty years or more ago, when my father died. It wasn't easy for her. It was very hard—and often lonely. We, Big Peter and I, never traveled with her from place to place. We were left behind with two sweet old maid aunts—Aunt Ella and Aunt Laura. Your grandmother must have missed us very much. But we had, Peter and I, a lovely childhood. Your grandmother made a big success—and was able to do many, many things for us."

Cynthia's eyes were huge—her lips parted breathlessly.

"Was Grandma a *great* actress? Was she famous?"

"Yes, she was—and is. Not the greatest perhaps, nor the most famous—but still great and famous enough. And she was very beautiful when she was younger. Some day, I'll show you the newspaper notices about her—we have books and books of

them—” Mrs. Abbott jumped to her feet. “Not now, Cynthia, I can see you are going to ask for them this minute. Please remember this is Saturday morning and Delia and I are up to our necks in work. Have you made your bed?”

Cynthia squirmed impatiently. *Have you made your bed?* Right in the middle of these lovely memories!

“But Peter wasn’t too poor or sad, Mother!” Close upon her heels, Cynthia followed her mother out of the boys’ bedroom. “He’s had an exciting life.”

“Exciting perhaps—but not the best kind of life, Cynthia, for any boy. He had too much attention. Why, he’s even been interviewed. Newspaper people have come and asked him what he thought of this or that! Just as though it mattered to thousands of people. That isn’t good for any small boy.”

“Like the movie stars!” Cynthia exclaimed. “I think that is positively thrilling. What did they ask him?”

“Oh, Cynthia, please keep out from under foot. I don’t remember. Oh, yes—how do you like traveling from city to city with your grandmother? Isn’t it an easy way to learn the geography of the United States? Do you like big cities or small towns? Do you like road companies—or staying in one town in a stock company? I saw *that* interview and I must say, it tried me a bit. How could it help but make Peter feel too, too important? Cynthia Abbott, do you call

that making a bed!” Mrs. Abbott was standing in Cynthia’s doorway.

Cynthia’s eyes blinked fast—but her thoughts raced faster—they were faster than her answer to her mother’s comment on her bed making.

“What is a stock company? And what’s a road company?”

Mrs. Abbott’s own thoughts this morning were a little helter-skelter. Now she forgot Cynthia’s bed making. “Well, a road company takes one play from city to city. They play the same play every week—but go to a new place. When Grandma was with a road company, Peter couldn’t, of course, go to school. He couldn’t enroll in a new school each week, you see.”

Cynthia caught her breath.

“I wouldn’t mind that. I should think Peter would *love* road companies. But how did he learn school things?”

“He had to be tutored. He had to have his lessons, Cynthia. Don’t think for one minute he could get out of them.”

Cynthia’s face shadowed. Then she asked, “What’s a stock company?”

“A stock company—why, a stock company plays a new play each week, but in the same city or town, for months, maybe. Then Peter could go to a school every day—just like other children.”

“Well, if a newspaper asked *me* which I liked bet-

ter, a stock company or a road company, I'd say road company," Cynthia answered. Then she opened her mouth on another question.

"Cynthia, don't ask me one thing more—go and find David. Tell him to come to me at once. I want to know where the other half of his pajamas is."

"Oh, jinks!" Cynthia groaned. "David makes me tired. I'll have to chase all over for him."

"I am afraid you will," Mrs. Abbott returned firmly.

But Cynthia had many more questions running around in her head, looking for answers.

"Mother!" she paused at the door, her hand on its knob. She felt if she *looked* as though she were going out for David, it would make her mother hopeful and cheerful. "Tell me, isn't Grandma *always* the star in every play? She's the heroine, isn't she?"

"No!" Mrs. Abbott shook her head with a tender little smile. "Not these days, Cynthia. Poor Grandma more often than not has to play sweet old ladies, now. She says she prefers to play meddlesome, frisky or bossy old women—she says it's more fun! Now, Cynthia, *scat!*"

And with a deep sigh, Cynthia scatted.

A few days later Mrs. Abbott gathered her five children about her and told them that they were planning to move away from the city. And as she made

her announcement, she looked from one face to another and smiled. Funny, surprised, confused little faces—

“Are we going to live at the beach?” Cynthia asked, yearning, but uncertain. “Even in winter?”

“Oh, no!” Mrs. Abbott laughed. “Not the beach! What a thought, Cynthia! You know that our various little beach cottages have never had furnaces. We would freeze to death. We are going to the country—to a small town.”

“Oh boy!” David shouted. “Oh boy! Oh boy!”

“And I won’t never have to go to school.” Michael’s eyes shone.

“You certainly will—and especially if you say ‘won’t never.’ You must learn to know to say ‘I won’t ever.’” Mrs. Abbott touched the tip of Michael’s small nose, or rather what was left of it. He had just fallen and scraped it again—oh, dear!

“Will there be cowboys?” David’s brows were knit in deep thought. Already he was ahead of his question, and was seeing himself riding a bucking broncho.

“Will there be a lot of wild animals out there?” Judy asked, her small mouth stiff and her eyes wide as saucers. Judy had all the courage in the world when it came to ordering people about who were twice as big as she was—but none at all when it came to strange sights and scenes. At the movies,

when she was sitting *on* her seat and not under it, she always had her fingers ready to instantly shield her eyes, or to pop into her ears at a moment's notice.

"I hope so!" said Michael promptly pointing his forefinger, and crooking his thumb in an imitation of a gun which he aimed at the middle of Judy's face. "Bang! Bang!" he shouted.

"Listen, children," Mrs. Abbott protested. "We are not taking you to darkest Africa. What's more, where we are going isn't the *real* country—it's going to be—" she didn't know how to express it.

"Not like the beach?" Cynthia persisted, puzzled. She loved their two weeks, each summer at the ocean. But what would this "country" be like? "I know," she went on as a bright idea came to her. "I've seen the country in the movies—chickens, cows and things—"

"Cows!" Judy echoed weakly. "Will there be *cows*? I don't like cows—" her voice wavered. "I hate them."

"What could a cow do to you—but buck you with its horns?" David asked scornfully.

"Buck me?" Judy squealed in a thin high squeak. "Oh, Mother, don't let's go to the country. I like animals in cages like at the zoo. I don't want them to get out," she wailed. "They scare me."

"We are not going on a farm, and there won't be any cows, Judy. And, David, stop tormenting her.

You are going to be very happy and you are all going to love this kind of country."

"Sure, I will love it," said Patty with a rich brogue. "I love the old country!"

"This country—" Mrs. Abbott went on after they had all laughed at Patty (who was proud that she had been smart enough to make them laugh). "This country—" Mrs. Abbott repeated, "will not be wild—nor will it be farming country. In some ways it will be like the city. There will be sidewalks, and paved streets. But there will also be yards, and little green fields to play in—and you can—well—" she broke off, not at all sure what they would do. "Anyway, you are going to love it and you are all going to grow even more healthy and rosy. But first your father and I are going to decide just where we shall go."

For several weeks, Mrs. Abbott went away early every morning. As she opened the door each night she announced wearily, "You can't imagine how tired I am!"

Then Delia was firm indeed. "Be quiet, the whole of ye."

"Why don't you try house hunting?" Mrs. Abbott asked her husband one night. "After all, you are going to live out there somewhere—and you ought to see the places *I've* been to!" she added.

"I'll trust your judgment, Suzy, my dear," Mr.

Abbott said soothingly. "When you have found one that suits you, it will suit me—"

There was no use at all, Mrs. Abbott decided, in trying to get her husband to go with her. None at all. And maybe it was just as well. He would have taken the first place they looked at, in order not to bother looking further. And then after they moved there, he would hate it. This, that, and the other thing would be wrong, and he would never be satisfied.

At last, Mrs. Abbott opened the door one evening, with a tired but happy smile.

"Children—Delia—I've found it," she called. "And tomorrow—I am taking your Daddy out to see it!" She tossed her hat on to a table and dropped into a chair. Delia and her five children swarmed about her.

"What color is it?" Cynthia asked breathlessly. "And how big is it—"

"It is—well—it *was* yellow—I think," her mother hesitated. "It has three rooms on the first floor," counting on her fingers, "five and a bath room on the second—and two bedrooms and an attic on the third—"

"A *what?*" Cynthia gasped. She couldn't believe her ears. Had her mother said *attic*? "Attic" that wonderful, fascinating, alluring, fairylike, romantic word—attic. It couldn't be true!

"An attic," Mrs. Abbott repeated. She did not

notice the enthralled look on her daughter's face. "And it has a front yard—and back yard—two cherry trees—an apple tree and some very mangy, beetle-eaten rose vines growing over the back porch—" she added as an afterthought.

"I love those roses—" Judy said, drawing in her breath. "I can take them to my teacher."

Cynthia did not come out of the attic during the rest of her mother's description. She crawled into its deep recesses and stayed there. In its mysterious, dark corners, she found a hidden will leaving the family millions—she found trunks filled with untold treasures—an attic! an attic! What a beautiful lovely word! Her mother's voice came to her from far, far away—

"Well, I can't describe the outside very well. It's not a new house—in fact it's old fashioned. Not quaint at all—just out of date. It has a sort of a tower effect on one side."

The electric effect of this word "tower" amazed Mrs. Abbott. Cynthia sprang to her feet and stood before her mother with shining eyes.

"Tower!" David whooped. "Tower—you mean like the *Little Lane Prince's* tower? Oh boy, I'll have to get a magic carpet," and David as nearly as possible put his words into effect, swooping his hand through the air like a flying carpet going at a very dangerous and dizzy angle.

“Oh, Mother!” Cynthia was quivering from head to foot with a delicious excitement. “Not a tower! Not a real tower room!”

“That’s right,” Mrs. Abbott repeated amazed, but with a glint of amusement in her eyes. “Not a real tower, Cynthia—nor a real tower room. Actually it is only an imitation of one, and not a very good one. But—” she broke off.

“But what, Mother?” Cynthia pleaded, not to be cheated of this enchanted tower room. “But what, Mother? Isn’t it any kind of tower, at all?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Abbott admitted slowly. “It is one kind of tower, Cynthia, any kind you want to call it. But I’d call it rather—dinky.”

“Oh, I’ll love it just the way it is. I’ll love it! An attic and tower in one house—” Cynthia sighed happily. Then returning to her corner, she curled up in her favorite chair. She wanted to dream about “attics” and “towers.” Magic words!



III

~ *Thermometers* ~

MR. ABBOTT flew from one extreme to the other with the greatest of ease, like the man on the flying trapeze. Only a short time ago, the city was the only place in the world to live. Now it was the country! Of course, he liked the house Mrs. Abbott had picked out—it was perfect. And every night he came home with a new idea for their house out in the “country.”

“Look what I have,” he would shout.

The children would gather around him in great excitement. But almost every time they were puzzled. Daddy did think of the strangest things!

A week after it was definitely settled that they were to move out into the small town of “Elwood,” he walked into the apartment, his face beaming more happily than ever, if that were possible. From the little black bag he always carried (the one that made

people take him for a doctor but which usually contained some letters he never had time to read in his office, whole sections of newspapers he wanted to re-read, and a few apples bought on the way home to eat before going to bed) he tenderly removed a small bundle.

“Now guess—” he held it up for his family to see. “In this package I have something that is going to bring me the greatest joy and comfort—when we get to the country.”

There was no answer for a few minutes—the children had “guessed” so often and hoped so much from these bundles he had been bringing home lately that they were afraid that they would be disappointed again. And they were. Their father proudly laid four thermometers on the dining room table.

“Good gracious!” was all Mrs. Abbott could say.

“One for the front door, one for the back, one for the living room, and one for my bedroom. I am going to know exactly how hot or cold it is outdoors. I am never going to be hot again. This apartment is beastly—it’s unhealthy—it’s abominable. We are going to have health first of all when we go out to Elwood.”

Michael poked his small nose over the top of the table, and decided that he never had seen anything so uninteresting as this “health.”

“Of all things!” Mrs. Abbott exclaimed.

"I thought it was going to be a pet," Judy said wistfully. "You told us, Daddy, that we could have pets when we got to the country—"

At this minute Delia called Mrs. Abbott out into the kitchen, and it was well she did, for had Mrs. Abbott heard the conversation that followed, she would certainly have protested.

"So I did! So I did! And you *are* going to have pets. All children should have pets, but not in an apartment. Now then, what pets do you want?" He sat down, eyeing his thermometers lovingly. What an inspiration it had been to buy them!

"Now, one at a time!" he commanded, as his five children crowded about him. "And take it easy. Don't push! I want this list right. There won't be any returns, if there are mistakes," he grinned broadly. He was in rare, high spirits these days. Taking a notebook from his pocket, he prepared to write. "This is going to be systematically done—everything in its proper place. Cynthia first—she's the oldest. Now, Cynthia, what kind of pet do you want?"

"Oh, Daddy, I want a—kitten. Just a little gray kitten."

"Fine! One, gray kitten," he wrote down. "Now you, David."

"A goat"—David announced firmly, and in a loud tone. "And a goat wagon."

Mr. Abbott moistened his pencil in his mouth, then stared at his older son over the rims of his eyeglasses.

"Where is your mother?" he asked. "She can't be in the room. I hear no comment from her."

"She isn't here, she's out with Delia," Cynthia answered promptly. "Do you think Mother would like a goat?"

"Well," Mr. Abbott began cautiously. "You couldn't possibly change that goat order to something a little more cosy to have about a house, could you, David?"

"No!" David rejected this suggestion with scorn. "I want a goat and a goat wagon," he repeated firmly.

"And I want to ride in David's goat wagon," Michael chirped, eyeing his brother jealously. He wished he had been big enough and smart enough to think of a goat wagon.

Mr. Abbott drew in his breath sharply, then let it out with a long whizz.

"It's not your turn, Mike, my boy. Judy comes next. Judy, and what would you like? Anything short of a camel."

Judy's round blue eyes were shining like stars. "All I want is a bunny. I want two bunnies."

"One for each hand," Patty nodded.

There was a shout of laughter at this.

"She's thinking of cookies, Daddy, she always wants one for each hand," Cynthia explained.

"Two bunnies, one for each hand," Mr. Abbott read aloud as he wrote. "Now, Michael, it's your turn."

"I want to ride in David's g-goat wagon," Michael stuttered. "A ride in David's goat wagon—that's what I want," he repeated.

"So—!" Mr. Abbott whistled. "You are going to put up a solid front about that goat, are you?"

"I bet Mother will hate that goat," Cynthia commented.

Patty was quivering from head to foot, waiting her turn, and her eyes were blinking very fast.

"Ah, Patricia, what do you want?" And her father pulled her up on his lap.

"I want a kitten, a goat wagon, and a bunny for each hand," and she put her chubby hands over her mouth and rocked with delicious glee.

"No duplications, my pet. But your laughter makes me realize you have more good common sense than all of us put together. I fear a few snags and complications." Mr. Abbott was watching the door through which his wife might enter at any moment.

"And, Daddy, what pet do *you* want?" Cynthia asked earnestly. "You've always said you loved animals."

“Well—” he looked from face to face with an apologetic air. “I trust you won’t mind if I say that you’ve overlooked the best pet of them all. Not that I don’t think you have shown excellent taste. But I, myself, however, would like a dog. I’ve always wanted one, but a city apartment is not, I feel, the best place in the world for one.” He picked up his notebook again. “I am writing down my own order. P.O.D. wants a D.O.G. How do you like that?”

“What’s P.O.D.? What’s that?” they chorused.

“Poor old dad,” he said, closing his book with a flourish. “That will be all for tonight.”

But “that will be all” meant less than nothing, apparently.

“What kind of dog?” Judy asked.

“Well, I hadn’t given it very serious consideration—” And Mr. Abbott picked up his newspaper.

But Judy persisted in an anxious voice, “What kind, Daddy?”

“Well, a watch dog!” he returned good naturedly, as he flipped his paper into shape. “That’s what we’ll need.”

Judy eyed her father nervously. “What for? What’s a watch dog for?”

“Oh, to keep tramps from poking their noses in at our back door.”

“Oh—o—o!” Judy squealed fearfully.

“What on earth bit you?” her father asked in blank

amazement. "Don't tell me you object to *my* pet."

"Judy's afraid of dogs, Daddy," Cynthia told him. "She pinches me black and blue when one comes near us on the street."

Mr. Abbott laid down his paper. "Well, now, Judy, you are going to like my watch dog. It's going to be a gentle friend, as far as you are concerned. It will love you. You wait and see."

Judy walked toward her father slowly.

"Daddy, I hate the country," she burst out tremulously.

"For the love of Pete!" Mr. Abbott fervently hoped his wife wouldn't come in at this minute. "What's the matter? You were all eagerness a few minutes ago. You wanted two bunnies, and they have not been refused."

"I don't like tramps poking their noses in at our back door—" she wailed, a little wildly.

"My word!" And Mr. Abbott listened nervously to the steps coming down the hall. This was a pretty pickle! His wife would think he had been frightening the children just before bedtime. But his face cleared when he saw Delia in the doorway. And when his eyes lit on her hair, he smiled broadly. In celebration of their moving, Delia had gotten a "permanent," a most extraordinary one. From the roots of her hair to the ends was a mass of wriggling little spiral curls, which stuck out like ringlets of fine wire.

Mr. Abbott beamed. Then he tweaked one of Judy's short pigtails. "Look, Judy! Look at Delia's hair. No wonder I want a watch dog! We can't have handsome tramps poking their noses in at our back door, and stealing away our beautiful Delia."

Judy turned and stared at Delia. Then her face cleared.

"Ah, go on with ye!" Delia protested with a rosy blush and a self-conscious grin. "Don't ye be believing one word yer daddy be telling ye, now. Sure, and he's quite a hand at fairy tales."

Mr. Abbott watched Judy's face out of the corner of one eye, and he breathed a sigh of relief at the dimple that was beginning to play in one cheek. "Thanks be to goodness!" he thought to himself. "You never know where you are going to end up, when you begin amusing children. You can only be sure it's the very last spot in the world you might expect to be."

"Come on, now!" Delia ordered in a soft, pleased tone. "The whole of ye, and off to bed."

Cynthia instantly let out an indignant protest. Going to bed at the same time as Patty! Patty was only three and she was eleven!

"Now, now," Delia laid one hand on Cynthia's head of light brown curls. "Ye can be helping me get the others off first. Ye will be the last one in bed, Cynthy. No one wants to be getting into that country more

than ye do, and yer mother and me is up to our necks packing chinaware."

Cynthia yielded with a smile. As long as she would be the last in bed, it was all right. And she did like to get to bed these days, to lie awake—imagining that attic and that tower room. They were the last things she thought of at night, and the first things she thought of in the morning.

"Cynthy is always so sensible, that she is," Delia smiled over at Mr. Abbott. "She's got a head on her. Now, the whole of ye, kiss yer Daddy goodnight—"

As each of the children kissed him, Mr. Abbott put a finger to his lips, in warning gesture. "Mum's the word about those pets," he whispered.

Cynthia leaned over her father's chair and kissed him on the top of the head.

"You know, Delia—" Mr. Abbott looked across at Delia with a wry expression, "I don't know what I am going to do about it—but Cynthia's worn a spot of hair off on the top of my head, with her kisses."

"Oh, go on with ye!" Delia giggled. "Her kisses are only butterfly kisses—that light."

"You wait, Delia!" And Mr. Abbott sighed so deeply and made such a forlorn face, that the children giggled with Delia. "Cynthia's going to bring on premature baldness. If this keeps up, I am going to look like a billiard ball, north of my forehead."

Just as Judy crawled into bed, ahead of Cynthia,

she whispered in a husky little voice, "Cynthia, are there kindhearted tramps?"

"Oh *goodness!*" Cynthia was annoyed. She had been just ready to steal away into her attic. Tonight, she felt sure, she would find something exciting there. Perhaps jewels belonging to an exiled princess—

"You are such a scared-cat, Judy. Daddy was only teasing about the tramp. Tramps are in songs. Don't you know—'Tramp, tramp, the boys are marching.' Think about your bunnies, and don't bother me."

Judy thought of nothing at all. She went straight to sleep, while Cynthia lay beside her weaving the loveliest story she had yet imagined. That is, as lovely a story as could be when it was over and forgotten in exactly eleven minutes.

The next afternoon, Michael burst into the kitchen with a howl.

"Davy says he won't let me go in his goat wagon, if I don't lend him my red tractor—the one Grandma gave me."

Delia was standing on a chair taking down glassware from the top shelf. "What's all the fuss about now?" she demanded.

"Davy says Peter's the only one he's going to let in his goat wagon!"

"What's this goat wagon ye got wound up in, I'd

be pleased to know? I never heard tell of it! If Davy has a goat wagon in that bedroom, I'd like to know what he did with the rest of the furniture? It's that crowded already. Go on back and tell him to let ye in it, or on it—or over it, and don't be bothering me. Be off with ye."

"He says it's *his* goat!" Michael wailed.

"He did, did he? Well it's mine now. He's got me goat—and ye tell him to give it back to me."

"It isn't your goat!" Michael protested with another long wail. "It was Daddy's. He said Davy could have it."

Delia jumped down to the floor.

"David!" she called sternly. "Come straight here."

And when David reluctantly appeared, "What's all this business about goats? What kind of a goat? If ye have any kind of a goat in that bedroom, for sweet mercy's sake let Michael play with it until I get this top shelf cleared."

"I haven't got a goat in there," David scowled. "I haven't got a goat anywhere."

Delia glared at him.

"Then I'd like to be knowing this blessed minute, what this goat talk is about. Yer goat it is one minute, the next *Daddy's*, then *mine*! And all the time there isn't a goat anywhere."

"Daddy says I can have a goat and a goat wagon out in the country," David told her.

“And Daddy said I could get in it,” Michael put in emphatically. “And David said only Peter could.”

“Well, yer Daddy does get the ideas, doesn’t he?” Delia snorted. “You two go back to that room and keep quiet. There’s no goat this afternoon—so neither of ye can play with it—”

“Can’t I *ever* get in David’s goat wagon?”

“Sure you can, someday when Sunday comes in the middle of the week. Now be off with ye, and out from under foot.”

“I don’t want to play with David,” Michael sobbed. “He’s mean to me.”

“All right then,” Delia said grimly, “ye can go in one room and David can go back to his. The two of ye is not going to get together until yer mother returns,” and Delia, taking them both by their shoulders, pushed them out of the kitchen and slammed the door.

Then she climbed up on her chair again, talking to herself in Gallic. Goats was it? Well, maybe it wasn’t too late, she could go back to Ireland yet. Goats could rove in the fields in peace, in Ireland.

Her own tiny room was next to the kitchen, and in no time at all, she heard sounds of strife and trouble through the wall. Her expression grim and determined, she got down off the chair. Then she stalked out of the kitchen and opened her door. Judy and Patty were in the room with Michael.

“What’s the meaning of this? Me two-by-two room, crowded with children. Sure and it isn’t big enough to shake a stick in, but I’d like to shake one at this minute!” she hinted darkly.

“Daddy says I could have a goat wagon ride,” Patty announced.

“Michael says David won’t—” Judy began.

“It’s that goat again, is it!” Delia’s eyes snapped. “Well, let me tell ye, this!” And she did. She told them *this* and she told them *that*, and by the time she had finished there was not another “peep” out of one of them about that goat.

The next few days were a little—no, altogether—upset. There was so much to be done. Endless rows of books had to be packed and crated. Everything, in fact, seemed endless, even the arguments, for the children refused to part with any of their possessions. Every toy they had must go to the country with them! Mrs. Abbott begged them to give some of the older ones away. But it was the oldest, the most worn ones they loved best.

When he came home at night, Mr. Abbott found more things than one could imagine that he declared were a “shame” and a “great pity” to throw away. He did very little actual packing, in fact he did considerable unpacking. He never missed a belonging until it was down at the bottom of a trunk or a box.

Then nothing would satisfy him until he had it back in his hands then and there. But he kept cheerful. It was Delia and Mrs. Abbott whose patience was tried to the utmost.

"There's nothing to do," Mrs. Abbott groaned once, "but to put all Mr. Abbott's things on top. For as sure as fate, he will need them tonight—and not a minute later—if we pack them at the bottom of a box."

"Ye might say," said Delia glumly, "ye have six children—not five. Mr. Abbott's like one these days—the biggest one."

It was early in June, and very hot indeed.

"Now, aren't you glad you're going to get out of the city?" Mr. Abbott asked every so often, just as though moving had been entirely his idea from the beginning. "I'm going to have a lot of fun with my thermometers. We will know just how much cooler it is out in Elwood."

"Will I have to stop everything I am doing several times a day to look at a thermometer to know how much cooler I am?" Mrs. Abbott asked, with a deep sigh.

"And another thing—" her husband went on, ignoring her comment. "Don't wear yourself out during these last few days trying to keep the children quiet. Let them jump, run and tear about the apartment to their heart's content. Don't get upset if you

drop a ton of books. Give those folks downstairs an idea of what five children could have done, if we hadn't worn ourselves out hushing them. Relax!" And he stood up and turned over a packing box with a bang that shook the apartment.

"Relax?" his wife groaned and held her head. "That's just too, too funny!"

At that moment Delia came rushing into the living room. Her face looked very much the way Michael drew the sun—fiery red, with stiff rays sticking out all around it, for her hair was on end—with exasperation.

"I sent David one hour ago to the store for some butter, and where is he, I ask ye!" Thrusting her head out of the livingroom window, she glared up and down the street. Then she pulled it in again with an angry, but satisfied, jerk and stood with her hands on her hips. "I'll be asking ye, to please look at him. He's coming all right, but so is Christmas!"

Mrs. Abbott sighed, went to the window and looked down. "What on earth—"

"He's after being an aeroplane this whole day long, ever since he got up this morning!"

Mr. Abbott leaned out to see his son coming toward him at a snail's pace. David was holding one hand at arm's length above his head, in the position, so he fondly believed, of an aeroplane ready to take a dive toward the ground. Dive it did, with great

speed, until it nearly crashed on the sidewalk. Then in time to prevent a disaster, it rose again, over his head. Up and down, this aeroplane dipped and soared like a roller coaster.

“David!” Mr. Abbott roared at the top of his voice.

Mrs. Abbott took firm hold upon her husband’s coat tails. “Darling, please!”

“Well, I never!” exclaimed Mr. Abbott, somewhat more softly. “And where, may I ask, is the butter? David! Come up here at once!”

With a surprised and hurt expression, David ambled into the apartment a few minutes later.

“Where is that butter, I’d like to be knowing this very minute,” Delia asked stormily. “You forgot it, I’ll be bound!”

“Oh—no! Here it is!” And he opened up his shirt. Next to his warm body, they could see a blue and white box.

“Butter!” Delia snorted. “It’s soup,” and she snatched the box and made for the kitchen at top speed.

“I suppose it would be too much to ask what you thought you were doing, waving your hand in the air one minute and the next threatening to slap the sidewalk?”

David wriggled in annoyance.

“I was just playing stunt flyer,” he muttered. And, turning on his heel, he stalked toward the door. Just

as he disappeared from sight, he tossed back, "Anyway, I was keeping the butter nice and cold."

Mr. and Mrs. Abbott looked at each other and then began to laugh.

"It kept *him* cold, I am sure, for it was just off the ice when he bought it—" Mrs. Abbott sighed a little, then laughed again as she shook her head despairingly.

The children went to bed with eager willingness on the night before their departure for their new home in the country. The next day would come all the sooner, they promised each other breathlessly, if they slept away the hours to its dawning. It was all the enchanted evenings rolled into one—the night before Christmas, the night before a birthday, or a trip to Bronx Park or the beach!

With the first rays of light, there was a twittering in the bedrooms like birds in their nests at dawn.

"It's come, Judy—it's here!" Cynthia sighed with a quivering joy, as she poked her younger sister. "Judy, it's here, it's here—the day we go to the house with a tower and an attic."

Judy stirred, sat up in bed, and rubbed her eyes.

"Is it really, *really* today?" she gasped. "Has it really come?"

"Hush!" Cynthia warned. "Just whisper. Yes, it's really come. I can't believe it."

Judy lay back again, and curled up contentedly. "Cynthy, Mother says it has an upstairs and downstairs. Won't that be fun? We've never lived in an upstairs and downstairs house."

"This apartment house has lots of stairs," Cynthia whispered softly with a little laugh, "but we can't run up and down any old time here. In the country, we will *own* these upstairs and downstairs, every minute."

Patty stretched in her crib in the corner, tossing one arm over her head. Then she sat up, clutching Winkie Binkie, and smiling sleepily at her big sisters. Judy crawled over Cynthia and scrambled to her baby sister's side.

"Patty, do you know what day it is?" she demanded as she got into Patty's crib.

"It's tomorrow!" Patty blinked hard, and wriggled with joy and pride at being smart enough to give the correct answer.

For a minute, Judy was puzzled. *Was* this the right answer? Was it tomorrow?

"Not tomorrow—" Cynthia corrected. "It's today."

"But Mother said it would be tomorrow—" Judy faltered. "Anyway it's the day we are going to the country."

"Let's all get into our bed. Judy, bring Patty over—so we can talk—"

Judy promptly dragged Patty over the pile of toys

and books that lay at the foot of her crib. She would never go to bed without everything she owned, to Delia's nightly exasperation.

Patty, sandwiched between her two sisters, was fairly smothered literally and figuratively—because the bed was not quite big enough for the three of them, and because she was overcome with excitement and pride. It wasn't often that her sisters were so insistent upon sharing their "talk" with her.

"Patty, you're going to love my bunnies. I am going to have two, a daddy bunny and a mommy bunny, and after a while I'll have lots of baby bunnies—and then we can have Easter eggs every day," Judy promised recklessly.

"Every day! Every day Easter baskets?" Patty squirmed with delight.

"She's only fooling you," Cynthia giggled. "Bunnies don't lay eggs."

"Yes, they do!" Patty bobbed her head very hard and hugged Winkie Blinkie. "They do! They do! They do!" she sing-songed over and over—her voice going higher at each "do."

"Hush!" warned Cynthia. "Mother will make us stop talking. Listen!"

And the sisters clung together "listening" very hard and with stifled breaths. Somewhere in the apartment they could hear the sound of voices. In a moment they plainly heard a shrill declaration:

“I-am-so-going-in-your-goat-wagon!”

At that instant, clatter and confusion came swiftly. Delia was talking. Mother was calling, and Daddy was shouting. The day of days had begun!

“Everybody up and on the job, children!” Mr. Abbott called in loud, delighted tones. “Everybody happy?”

Through the open windows came a very unexpected answer, roared in no uncertain terms. “Not yet, idiot, but soon!”

The children were jubilant—it was the funniest thing they had ever heard, and Daddy made such a silly face at the window that they had to hold their sides as they rocked with wild laughter. Daddy *was* funny!

“And that’s the last word we will ever have to hear from our friends in this apartment house,” he announced with a grin. “Is anybody sorry?”

No one was.

Mr. Abbott had only one word of regret that morning. “It’s a very great pity,” he said to his wife with an air of deep disappointment, “that you packed my thermometers. I’d like one right now. I’d like to know what it would read in this apartment, so I could compare it with the temperature out in the country.”

“I am not in the least disturbed about anything I’ve packed, but I am nearly frantic with the things I’ve forgotten,” Mrs. Abbott replied with a worried expres-

sion. "From what I've found around here this morning, I guess we'll have to use the children for packing boxes. Everything else is full."

David, Judy and Michael fell upon this idea with a shout. Cynthia, alone, was not pleased. Wouldn't they look silly, and wouldn't everyone stare, when five children marched into a train, just bulging with bundles? Oh, dear!

David took his mother at her word, and followed her about, asking her when she was going to "pack" him. There was plenty of room in his blouse, and in his pockets, he told her.

"Be ready for the taxi—everybody!" Mr. Abbott warned every few minutes. "Remember, keeping him waiting is going to cost us money."

But when the bell did ring, and the taxi driver announced that he was there, it was Mr. Abbott who kept him waiting.

"Oh, my goodness! Where is my key ring? Oh, my goodness!" he shouted. "I had it only a few minutes ago. Find it someone! Oh, my goodness!"

Everyone, including Patty, raced around in dizzy, blind circles, as they always did when Daddy lost something.

"This is a pretty pickle! Oh, my goodness!" Mr. Abbott kept saying. "The key to the new house is on it!"

Now the moving men arrived and the uproar and

confusion was beyond belief. Then suddenly, without any warning at all, Mr. Abbott shouted for the last time in their New York apartment.

“All aboard, children! The taxi is eating up money, standing there. What on earth is keeping you all? Why, of course I’ve found the keys.”

“Sure and what’s keeping us?” Delia hinted darkly. “I might be giving a true answer, but I won’t.”

With a roar and clatter, Mr. and Mrs. Abbott, their five children and Delia, all carrying packages of various sizes and shapes, said goodbye for the last time to their New York City home! Mrs. Abbott promised herself she would ask her husband, when she got around to it, if by any chance he had had the keys in his pocket all the time. But she never did, for even getting into the taxi was not achieved without difficulty. Who was going to sit next to the windows?

“Climb right in, children, please!” When Mrs. Abbott used that quiet, firm tone, her family obeyed without question—and quickly.

Off they started, with Cynthia jammed in between her mother and Delia on the back seat; Patty sitting on Delia’s lap; Michael leaning against his mother’s knees; David on one of the auxiliary seats; his father on the other. Judy stood up, holding on to David.

Mr. Abbott turned his head to watch the taxi meter, and when the traffic lights changed to red, and the cab came to a stop, he groaned, “I’ll have to take up a

collection! Look at the amount of that fare!”

Cynthia tried not to think of how they would all look when they tumbled out of the taxi. She wouldn't glance at one person in the depot, not one, when they got out with all those bundles. It was a disgrace!

Mr. Abbott was to put his family on the train, then return to his office. He would come out later to the new home, in time for dinner.

To Cynthia's mind, the exit from the taxi and the entrance into the train were even worse than she had imagined.

Michael and David tore through their car of the train shouting, “I wacky a window!”

Mr. Abbott called after them in a stern voice that made everyone nearly stretch his neck to see this entertaining cavalcade. “Michael! David! Come here! Stay near your mother, now. I don't want to find a few children missing tonight.”

“Oh, Daddy!” they protested as they reluctantly returned.

Cynthia pressed her nose against a window and shut her eyes. This was dreadful! All the people in sight were smiling. Why did Daddy always think it was so funny to let everyone in the world know how many children he had!

When, at last, the conductor called, “All aboard,” and Mr. Abbott said goodbye and left the car, Cynthia drew a deep sigh of relief. That part was over!

Then to her acute misery, her father shouted gaily from the car platform as he stuck his head in at the door, "Count them, Delia! Count them! See if you have them all. Is Judy there?"

Delia stood up and counted heads. "Sure and they're all here—every last one—" she called back in a loud, lusty tone.

"Oh, goodness!" Cynthia shivered. "*Oh, goodness!*"

Then the train gave a lurch forward, Mr. Abbott waved from the station platform, and they were off!

For a long, lovely time, Cynthia felt alone in a strange, beautiful new world. Nor did she reply to Judy, who was chatting happily at her side. At length Judy gave up in disgust, and went to sit with Patty. Cynthia was deaf, dumb and blind, she told her small sister.

Cynthia was not deaf, nor dumb nor blind. A home in an enchanted land was waiting for her at the end of this journey. Grandma's big theatrical trunk, which for years had been stored unopened in the basement of the apartment house, was on the train with her. It was to be taken up and placed in that—attic! Would she be permitted to rummage in it on a rainy day the way children did in story books? What lovely and mysterious things were packed in its depths? Mother had told her of the time, years before, when Grandma had played the Czarina of

all the Russians. Cynthia drew in her breath in quivering ecstasy. She had seen a photograph of that dazzling court costume, and the memory of it enthralled her. Did that precious gown lie hidden in that trunk? Her gray eyes were starry in anticipation of the moment when her eager fingers could touch its satiny folds. She saw herself as a royal figure, with a crown of "jewels" on her head, and long strings of "pearls" and "diamonds" about her neck. She remembered with rapturous delight that her mother had told her there was a great court train of velvet edged in "ermine" in the trunk. Nor did she recall what her mother had added—"But that ermine is really only strips of bunny skins, my dear!"

Perhaps, too, Grandma had, unknown to Mother, tucked away old books in that trunk, books filled with tales of long, long ago—. At this minute, Cynthia was keenly and gratefully aware that Judy had left her. There were times when it was sweet, beyond words, to dream alone.

The train was now far beyond the railroad yards, beyond the hideously ugly sections of the city, and wide meadows of tall grasses, bulrushes and cattails stretched on both sides of the tracks. Cynthia drank in the scene with luminous eyes. She heard a train whistle trailing its mournful wail across the meadows, and it filled her with a strange delight. She felt as though she were far, far away and going farther!

At every station the younger children stood up and clamored in excited voices, "Are we there? Are we there?" Even by the time they had reached the first station, it had seemed the longest train trip they had ever taken. After they had passed the fourth station, an epidemic of hunger broke out without warning. Mrs. Abbott was not sure who was stricken first. But once under way, the attack swept through her little brood.

"But it isn't anywhere near lunch time, children," she protested. "Please think of something else. Whatever made you think of eating now, I wonder?"

"Ye'd like to know, would ye," Delia answered up promptly. "It was the sight of them children that got in at the last station. They're eating bananas. I've an idea they're going on a picnic—with all the lunch boxes they be having."

"Well, we are *not*, positively *not* going to eat bananas on a train, and that's all there is to it. Bananas—on such a hot day! It makes me ill to even think of it!" Mrs. Abbott declared.

"I'm *starving!*" Judy wailed.

"Stop that nonsense, at once," her mother ordered sharply.

Silently, then, Judy and Michael and Patty stood in the aisle near her seat, looking at her with deep reproach in their eyes. How could any mother refuse food to her hungry children—turn a deaf ear on their pleas?

"I'm thirsty! And there isn't any more water in the cooler." It was David, adding thirst to the pressing needs of the family.

Delia sniffed.

"There they go! They're off! It hits them like a deadly plague, they all git it at onct, and over they go in a heap, dying of starvation and hunger. That's the way it was, these many times when I took them to the park. Ye never can tell what will do it, sometimes it's nothing but a squirrel eating a peanut. It's enough to try the patience of all the saints," she grumbled crossly.

Mrs. Abbott turned her head away and looked out of the window. The journey was getting too much for her, too. Suddenly, she smiled, and looked so alert, so happy, that it was contagious. The children crowded closer, eyes bright with curiosity. What was it?

"Get your things all ready. Don't forget *anything*. It's the next station. We are getting off very soon now—"

"Oh, boy!" David gasped. It didn't seem possible!

Without a word, all the younger Abbotts scampered for their seats. Their hearts were beating with stifling excitement, almost more overpowering than during that last moment just before they were permitted to see their Christmas presents. They were completely beyond speech!



IV

~ *A Lost Father* ~

THE hushed silence continued as the Abbott children got off the train. Looking around in round-eyed wonder at the pretty little suburban station of Elwood, they drank in the unfamiliar scene with confused delight.

Happily, and without confusion, they allowed themselves to be bundled into the shabby big automobile that was to drive them to their new home. Even the grown-ups, Delia and Mrs. Abbott, were silent. Their city home was behind them—many miles, it seemed,—and many years. They were entering a new and strange world. Suddenly, Delia's eyes filled with tears, and she put her arm tightly around Michael, her baby. It was a comfort to feel him there, to know that as long as she had his chubby hand in hers, she hadn't separated herself completely from everything she had known in America.

Hot and tired as Mrs. Abbott was, she, too, shared a little of Delia's panic. As the big car sped along, Delia and Mrs. Abbott felt lost between two homes—the one they had left and the one to which they were coming.

They were driving now along a pretty street which was heavily shaded with big maple trees. Each house had its nicely kept front lawn, and neatly clipped hedges, which marked where one lawn ended and another began.

"We live farther out—" Mrs. Abbott broke the silence which had held them all spellbound, since they had left the train. "It's the older part of the town, and not so closely built up. There are a few open spaces—" she turned to Delia.

Delia nodded, greatly pleased. She could do with a few open spaces—for where would she turn the children loose if there were none, she asked herself?

The car whirled around a corner, and they turned into a street with only a few homes on it. "And, heaven be thanked," Delia thought reverently, "there are open spaces—"

Then the car was brought to a standstill at the curb.

"Oh, Davy!" Cynthia pinched her brother's arm. "It *has* a tower, after all. It's only a *little* one, but it is a tower—"

"It looks haunted—."

"Maybe it is!"

Speechless no longer, the children tumbled out of the car in wildest confusion. Indeed, what with their excited chattering, such a hubbub arose that they sounded for all the world like a flock of grackles, suddenly taking possession of an oak tree.

It was a beautiful lawn, they told their mother over and over. In the ride up from the depot they had not seen one lawn half so fine. More important, this front lawn of theirs looked like the *country*. The grass was high and all tangled up with wild flowers,—Queen Anne's Lace, dandelions, buttercups and clover blossoms—much nicer than the cut grass in Central Park.

“Oh, Mother!” Michael suddenly squealed with joy. “Mother, we've got squirrels at our new home!”

If Michael was delighted to see the squirrel, the feeling was not mutual. Exceedingly displeased at the intrusion, the object of Michael's delight hung on the side of a tree glaring at them with hard, beady, black eyes. His tail was thrashing up and down, and he scolded at the strangers for all he was worth.

Judy hung back and waited for her mother, until Mrs. Abbott had finished helping Delia and the driver haul things out of the car. Then she slipped her own moist, warm hand into one of her mother's and held on very tightly. The house looked so big and so strange, that it almost frightened her. She wanted

to be very close to her mother when they climbed up the steps to its broad veranda.

Mrs. Abbott looked down at her small daughter with a smile. "Funny little goosie! Just look at Michael and Patty!"

Already Patty and Michael were racing up and down the long porch, letting out wild whoops of joy. They were not interested in the inside of the house. The porch was joy enough for them at the moment.

"It has a tower, hasn't it, Mother!" Cynthia exclaimed, her eyes shining.

"Well, I wouldn't exactly call it a *tower*—a cupola—perhaps—"

"Well, I'm going to call it a tower," Cynthia told her.

"They might have cut the grass—" Mrs. Abbott commented as she put the key into the lock. "They promised me they would."

"Oh, Mother!" Cynthia walked to the railing of the porch and stood looking down. "Don't let's have it cut. It's so pretty. It's *exactly* like the country. Look at all the flowers! None of the other houses have such tall grass! I think it's nice. It's so different from the park—" Cynthia was very disappointed when Mrs. Abbott explained that this tangled, lovely little bit of wilderness would have to go.

Once the door was opened, the children rushed into

the house with a happy shout. Then, for a moment, the shout was followed by a surprised hush. What big rooms! They seemed huge, in their emptiness, many, many times larger than those in the apartment. But the surprise was quickly overcome by curiosity, and the children scampered in all directions, to explore every nook and corner of the first floor.

“Upstairs! Let’s go upstairs!” David called as soon as they had completed this survey. And he and Cynthia almost knocked each other down in an effort to lead the procession up the stairs. “Come on kids! Let’s find our own rooms!”

Cynthia had been promised a room of her own for the first time in her life. It was a small room at the front of the house, Mrs. Abbott said. And Cynthia was determined that no one else should lay eyes on her new possession before she did. Clutching David by his shirt, she held him back, and with a leap was ahead of him on the stairs. Once on the upper landing, she spun around like a top. Where was the front of the house now?

“Oh, I’ve found it! I’ve found my room, my own room!” she shouted with wild pride. “Oh, David, look! Look! It’s part of the tower. My room is nearly round. It’s round in one corner. Oh, David, come quick. Isn’t it wonderful!”

David was at her side, his eyes wide with excitement. “It’s part of the tower!” he echoed. “It’s part

of the tower. Look at all the windows! Oh, boy!” and he let out a long breath. “Oh, boy!”

Then he turned and rushed toward the other rooms, leaving Cynthia still standing spellbound in her precious “tower room.” She could hear her brothers and sisters calling to each other and scampering about, as they went from room to room like so many curious cats in a new place. But for the moment Cynthia was not interested in their discoveries. The room she had dreamed of having—hers, her own. Not until she heard David shout again, did she stir.

“Let’s find the attic! Let’s find the top of the tower.”

With a sudden leap of her heart, Cynthia ran out into the hall. The attic! Oh she must, she *must* see the attic and the upstairs part of the tower *first*. She was the oldest. It was only fair!

“Where is the door to the attic?” David called as she came toward him. “I can’t find it.”

Feverishly, Cynthia glanced about. Every door in sight was wide open but one. That must be it! That must be the magic one, leading up into an enchanted realm. She darted toward it, her eyes dark with expectation, her cheeks burning. Then, triumphantly, she threw it open. Before her stretched a long flight of winding, narrow stairs.

“Oh, David, they’re like fairy steps, aren’t they?” And she caught her breath, scarcely believing her

eyes. It was all coming true, everything she had hoped for these last few weeks.

She started up the stairs, with David at her heels, Judy behind him, and then Michael. Small Patty followed slowly, half crawling, one step at a time. Her brothers and sisters were not going to leave her behind and out of their fun.

“The tower! The tower!” David and Cynthia chanted.

In one corner of the large, front room on the top floor was a circular wall in the shape of a bay window, but instead of one window, there were six high, small windows. To the Abbott children, from the moment they spied it, it was a tower!

Cynthia tingled with happiness. But as she turned to speak to David, her eyes glowing, she wished he were Peter. Peter always seemed to understand, better than David, just how she felt.

“Isn’t it marvelous? I know Grandma will love it when she comes to visit us. She told me once that the one thing she’s always wanted was a tower room, with a rope ladder leading up to it that she could pull up after her when she got into it.”

“She couldn’t pull those stairs up,” David replied practically. “If she did, the house would fall apart.”

“Bother, why did David always have to be so sensible?” Cynthia thought to herself as she followed the

younger children out of the tower room in search of the attic. But a disappointment awaited them. At the back of the house, the Abbotts found only a room—a very ordinary looking one at that!

Cynthia felt that it was up to her to do something when the others looked so dismayed. “I guess this is only Delia’s room,” she said. “Let’s open the other doors.”

David opened two, but only closets were on the other side.

“There *must* be an attic. Mother said there was an attic!” Cynthia persisted. “Maybe, it’s behind a secret panel. Maybe we’ll have to tap on the wall to find it, like they do in mystery books.”

“Cynthy!” It was Patty, out in the hall, her voice trembling with importance. She had found a door none of the others had noticed, and she was delighted. “Here’s a door. A big, big, door!”

She was right.

Once more it was Cynthia who won the race toward the unexplored territory. Opening the door, she took one step beyond the sill. Then she stopped short. It was very, very dark ahead of her.

David stuck his head past her shoulder. “It’s haunted—it’s a haunted attic!” he declared.

Judy eyed her brother in alarm. “What’s a haunted attic?” she asked nervously.

“Look!” David continued in a deep voice, catching hold of Judy’s arm and dragging her through the open door. “It’s as black as night.”

“Not as black as night,” Cynthia corrected bravely, “it’s got little lights in it.”

Judy took one look, then shut her eyes tight. “I don’t like it, I don’t like it. I’m going downstairs—” and she dashed for the steps leading down from the third floor.

“I like it.” Michael was determined to show that he was just as courageous as anyone. He rather enjoyed feeling “scared.”

“It’s got a lot of ‘eyes’ in it,” he added sturdily.

It was just as well that Judy did not hear him say that the attic had “eyes,” or she might have broken her neck falling down those narrow stairs in a headlong rush to get away from “eyes.”

Cynthia’s own eyes had now grown used to the darkness, and she noticed the rafters overhead and the two small windows at one end. It was, she decided with great satisfaction, a real attic. That is, if an attic could be real without trunks. But they would be coming, she reminded herself.

When the children all got down to the first floor again, they discovered that the moving men had arrived, as well as the men from the telephone company. Mr. Abbott was determined that they should not be without a telephone for a minute. But a still better

surprise was the discovery that Delia and Mrs. Abbott had already spread out a picnic lunch for them on the kitchen sink—a lunch they had had with them on the train! David had carried a box of cakes (oh, if he had guessed!), Cynthia a box of sandwiches, and Delia the big thermos bottle of cold milk!

“Why didn’t you tell us we had a lunch with us, Mother?” David asked.

“Sure, and if it’s bliss to be ignorant, it’s folly to be wise!” Delia announced. “And what ye don’t know won’t hurt ye.”

“And—we even had bananas!” Judy commented reproachfully. “We could have divided one.”

“If there’s one thing in this whole world I dislike, it’s the smell of bananas on a train,” declared Mrs. Abbott. “As long as I am your mother, you will never, never eat one near me when we are traveling.” And wearily she brushed back her hair. How hot and tired she felt! Moving was far more an adventure to the children than to her, she thought. In fact, to her it was no adventure at all. It was a job!

“And I can hardly be waiting—” Delia declared, “to try out the good part of this country business—and turn the lot of ye outdoors. We’ve got plenty of work to do, your mother and me.”

Out-of-doors! It was so wonderful to find it there, as soon as you opened the front door. Out-of-doors,

theirs to play in whenever they wished. All through the long, hot afternoon they rushed about, making discoveries at every turn, tingling with the certainty that adventure awaited them on every side, adventure that would never end so long as they lived in this glorious place.

Ever after, their memory of that first afternoon was to be a misty one of complete delight. They could not remember just what they did. But they knew beyond all doubt that it was the happiest day of their lives. And very soon Peter would be there to share in the fun.

Delia and Mrs. Abbott, too, never had a clear idea of what they, themselves, did that day during the time between lunch and dinner. But of one thing they were absolutely sure. They never stopped moving! They knew that beds in six bedrooms were set up and made, that the dishes were gotten out of the barrels, and the pots and pans. But as for the rest of it—! “The saints preserve us, it’s a mess,” declared Delia.

Late in the afternoon, Mrs. Abbott went to the telephone, and using the names and telephone numbers that had been suggested to her by the real estate agent, she gave some orders for dinner. It was to be what Delia called a “calamity” dinner, for it was the one she always planned when everybody was too distracted to cook or to think—cold ham, sliced tomatoes, potato salad, and glasses of milk.

Mr. Abbott's train was due at 6:52, and Mrs. Abbott wanted his homecoming to be a happy one. She wanted him to feel that commuting was no more difficult than getting home to an apartment from his office.

"Delia," she asked anxiously, after it did seem that he *should* have arrived, "what time is it? How long did it take us to come up from the station?"

"Time?" Delia snorted, "I ain't had an idea about time since I got up this morning—which, off hand, I'd say was three months ago, plus a week or so thrown in for good measure."

Mrs. Abbott was growing uneasy.

"It does seem that Mr. Abbott ought to be here by now."

"He's walking, remember. He won't be taking no cars. Himself is going in for health, and there's nothing more healthy than long walks in a blistering sun," Delia answered tartly. She was very hot.

"Dear me!" Mrs. Abbott sighed. "Yes, I suppose he *has* walked. But I hope he hasn't gotten lost somewhere. I don't want him to begin his country life with such a discouraging experience."

"Is Daddy lost?" Judy asked, worried. Judy always worried about her family, whether they were near or far.

"Maybe he only missed his train!" Mrs. Abbott was talking to herself. But, she thought gloomily,

that wasn't a cheering thought, either! It might make him disgusted immediately with commuting.

The telephone rang. It rang loudly, demandingly. Cynthia and David raced to answer it.

"Stop!" Mrs. Abbott ordered. "Please don't answer that, children. It must be Daddy. I want to speak to him."

"Maybe he waited to get my goat wagon," David suggested. Mrs. Abbott merely gave her son a look of hopeless despair. She took the receiver off the hook with a sinking feeling. Now what?

The minute the receiver was in their mother's hand, the children could distinctly hear a roaring sound.

"It's Daddy!" And Judy's brow cleared. "He's not lost, he's there."

"Wait! Wait!" Mrs. Abbott begged into the telephone. "I can't understand one word, not one word you are saying. Where are you?"

There was another roar, then a silence. Mrs. Abbott put her hand over the receiver, and looked about in dismay.

"Where is Daddy?" It was Cynthia who was worried now.

"He doesn't know. He is finding out. He took the wrong train," their mother told them.

Delia now joined the anxious group around the telephone. "Sure he must be somewhere, trains always get some place or another—"

“Well, wherever he is, it’s *another place*, than this town—Oh, yes, I am here!” Mrs. Abbott was speaking into the telephone again. “Where *are* you?—I can’t understand!—There couldn’t be a town with a name like that!—What are you going to do now?—Oh, I am sorry—get here when you can—” Mrs. Abbott hung up. “If that isn’t the last straw, positively the last. Your Daddy says he is in Pow-wow. There just couldn’t be a place with a silly name like that!”

“Is he lost for good?” Michael asked with quivering lips. After all, he didn’t have another father, and Daddy was lots of fun to have about.

“Why did he take the wrong train?” Cynthia asked.

“If you all are going to stand around asking silly questions, you can go to bed. *Why* did he take the wrong train? Why does anyone take the wrong train?” Mrs. Abbott demanded of no one in particular.

“Why do they?” David persisted obligingly.

“Don’t be bothering your mother. She’s tired!” Delia ordered severely. “Sure and with a hundred and one *wrong* trains, and only one *right* train—it’s small wonder I say. You come out here and rest, Mrs. Abbott. You’re all tired out.”

Opening the front door, Delia dragged a chair out on to the veranda. “You sit right down. He’ll get here, never fear.”

Mrs. Abbott smiled gratefully. The children fol-

lowed her out through the door, and huddled in a little heap on the top steps of the porch. This was a serious state of affairs—a lost father.

“I got lost once!” Michael whispered in a small voice. He shivered. His brother and sisters nodded. They remembered, for they had heard the story many times. It was one of the family fables. It had happened in a department store, and their mother had been nearly frantic for over half an hour. And when she found her small son, seated on a pile of blankets, a crowd had gathered around him. The tears were streaming down his cheeks, but he made no sound. At the sight of his mother’s sweetly familiar face, as she pushed and elbowed her way toward him, he had let out just one wail of reproach.

“You losted me! You losted me!”

“Patty was lost in the park one day,” Judy now recalled. “It was awful.”

“Once I read about a man who got lost in the mountains, and a big dog found him. He was nearly frozen stiff in the snow when the dog gave him some whiskey.” It was David, contributing his story.

“Well, Daddy won’t get frozen stiff in the snow today,” Cynthia said with scorn. “Don’t be silly!”

David looked straight ahead and thought to himself that his sister talked to him as though he weren’t *nine*! After all, she was only two years older. He didn’t so much mind her saying that a man couldn’t

freeze to death on a hot day like this, but he did very much mind being called "silly." Anyway, he *had* read that story! Gloomily he eyed his older sister. Without doubt, Cynthia would get very smart and superior after Peter came. When Peter and Cynthia were together, they always treated him like a baby, as if he didn't count. For the minute, he quite forgot about his father's being lost, and concentrated on the hope that Peter would get so lost that he would never find their new house.

The telephone rang again. Mrs. Abbott ran into the house, her children close behind.

"Daddy found himself!" Michael shouted.

Mrs. Abbott took the receiver off the hook. *Now* what?

Yes, it was Daddy. They could all hear his voice distinctly. He was shouting so loudly that it almost seemed he didn't need a telephone, and that he could have just stuck his head out of the window wherever he was and been heard for miles and miles—right to where they were!

"Glory be to goodness!" Delia exclaimed. "This is a beginning to his country life that will be his ending."

"All right! I am sorry—I am *very* sorry—Be sure this time of your bus, *please!* Good, we'll be glad to see you." With a weary smile Mrs. Abbott hung up and turned to her children. She shook her head sadly.

"Your Daddy got into a bus marked *Elwood* in that silly town he called 'Pow-wow' but he forgot to ask whether it was *going* to Elwood, or *coming* from it. It seems it was coming from Elwood! Now he's many miles farther away than when he first called us."

"Now-what-do-ye-think-of-that-I'll-be-asking-ye?" Delia exclaimed. "If that doesn't be beating all!"

"The next time Daddy telephones, where do you guess he will be?" Michael asked eagerly, delighted with this new game.

"I give up about where Daddy will be, but I don't need to guess where you all will be in a few minutes. Right in bed. You have all been awake since dawn. It's been a long day."

"Oh, can't we see Daddy get found?" Judy wailed.

"Just think how much fun it will be to go to sleep in a new room and in a new house," said Mrs. Abbott, ignoring Judy's question. "And it's even more fun to wake up in one—"

And she took one of Patty's hands and one of Michael's and steered them toward the stairs.

Cynthia was eager to go to bed in her room that was the lower part of a tower in one corner. It was an adventure, and she knew she would have the most beautiful, exciting thoughts as she went to sleep.

After the children were in bed, Delia and Mrs. Abbott sat out on the porch and waited for Mr. Abbott.

"These wouldn't be mosquitoes, now? These bugs that's biting like sin?" Delia slapped her arm viciously.

"They would be!" replied Mrs. Abbott, as she looked out into the darkness.

They slapped at the mosquitoes for an hour or so—and did little or no talking. Delia much preferred going to bed herself, but she wouldn't leave Mrs. Abbott until her husband was "found."

Finally Mr. Abbott was "found," but not until they had both secretly given up all hope. And, to their amazement, he came shouting up the walk in high good humor.

"I've only one complaint to make—and I am going to make it. I am going to write a strong letter to the president of that ding-busted railroad. It's an outrage and a crying shame that they haven't more guards or signs in that depot, so people can't make mistakes. That idiot guard I asked, didn't even bother to listen to my questions. He just shouted, 'Yes.' Accommodating—but a dyed-in-the-wool rascal."

He was happy—and proud of his new home. And he did not seem half so tired as they.

"It's a pity that our atlas is probably packed down deep in a crate, for I'd like to look up the places I've been to, tonight," he said cheerfully over a snack out in the kitchen. "And another pity is—you probably haven't had time to hang the thermometers? I am

curious to know what the temperature is now.”

“We certainly have *not* had time to hang thermometers!” Mrs. Abbott answered emphatically. “I didn’t need any thermometer to know it was *hot*!”

“Oh, well—” he leaned back contented, “you know I’d like to buy this house—. This is the life!”

After a minute’s quiet, he stood up, and frowned in a puzzled way, as he cocked his head. “Sounds as though the country around here had the hiccoughs! What’s that racket?”

“Racket?” Mrs. Abbott echoed, as she, too, stood up. Then she smiled. “Those, my dear, are crickets, and I like the sound.”

“I am glad you do!” her husband returned doubtfully. “I suppose it’s cheery—but it will take getting used to! Maybe that chirping will lull me to sleep, however, and faith I need it! Let’s say with Tiny Tim, ‘A merry good night, and God bless us, every one!’ ”

The long day was over—and they were both happy to go to bed, at last. But before dawn they awoke—or rather, were awakened.

“Holy cats! Suffering cats!” Mr. Abbott exclaimed, sitting bolt upright in bed. “What’s going on?”

“Well, it’s cats all right. But that’s not all,” Mrs. Abbott told him. “There are other noises.”

Judy’s voice, clear and unmistakable, was raised high above a rapidly increasing uproar.

“Daddy—stop—those—cats—”

“Jumping jupiter!” Mr. Abbott was now fully awake, and out of his bed.

“Daddy-stop-those-cats—” Judy demanded again, at the top of her lungs.

“Mother-tell-Judy-to-stop!” Cynthia complained.

Mr. Abbott was stumbling around in the dark, and muttered as he stumbled.

“For the love of Pete—aren’t there wall plugs in this stupid house—I can’t find a light.”

“Daddy-stop-those-cats,” Judy demanded again.

“Judy, please keep still!” Mrs. Abbott called. “You will wake the whole house.”

To the clatter was now added a new uproar. Delia was stumbling down the attic stairs.

“Where are you, Tom?” Mrs. Abbott asked dismally, feeling around on the wall by the bed for the switch.

Her husband’s voice came to her from high above. “I don’t know what I am standing on, I’m sure!” he answered impatiently. “It might be the piano for all I know. None of the furniture is where it belongs!”

“Mrs. Abbott, Mrs. Abbott—” Delia called anxiously, “where am I, and where are you?”

“Daddy! Mother!” It was David’s voice, raised in frightened protest.

And the cats were still howling—wailing—tearing the night to pieces.

Mr. Abbott found the light, at last, hanging from

a center bracket overhead. In the sudden glare, he jumped down from a crate which was standing on end.

"You really didn't need to stand on that. You could have reached the light from the floor," his wife remonstrated mildly.

Without a word, her husband picked up one of his shoes and marched to the window.

Delia, standing blinking in the doorway, was enveloped in a fantastic garment she called her kimono. Behind her were Judy, Cynthia and David.

"Make those cats stop!" Judy sputtered.

"Give me just one minute, my child, and your wish shall be granted," her father told her, as he opened the screen in the window. Then he pulled his arm back with his shoe still in his hand.

"Oh, darling, don't—," his wife began.

Before she could finish, Mr. Abbott had flung his shoe as far as he could into the darkness. Without a moment's hesitation, the cats went on with their noise.

"Bad shot!" was Mr. Abbott's only comment. "David, hand me my other shoe." David was delighted—this was fun!

"Now—" Mr. Abbott took aim carefully and let fly. There was instantly a furious howl of protest from one cat.

"Bull's eye!" Mr. Abbott shouted. Before his wife could stop him, he had picked up one of her shoes

from the floor and had sent it whirling into space.

"If this don't beat all!" Delia grumbled. "Judy, you started this. Ye'd think ye never heard tell of cats in the city."

"Thomas Abbott, don't you dare send my other shoe out that window!" Mrs. Abbott protested. "Think how ridiculous we'll look in the morning, running around in a neighbor's garden looking for—."

It was no use at all! Mr. Abbott was having the time of his life. Winking at his audience, he now wound up like a baseball pitcher.

"This will do the trick!" he promised.

And it did! There was a clatter of smashing glass, angry howls of cats—a mad scamper—and then silence. A very overpowering silence.

"Well!" he turned around and faced his family triumphantly. "That's that!"

"*That's-that* sounded to me like a window," his wife returned grimly, as she reached out to turn off the light. "Run back to bed, children."

But the children did not move. In the house next door, some forty feet from them, they could see lights flashing, first in one window and then another.

"They're signaling us!" David suggested excitedly. "I bet that means O.K."

"And I'll be betting right this very moment, it doesn't mean O.K.," Delia put in. "Be off with ye—Judy, David and Cynthia—to bed, and not another

word out of ye. Already I can see this country air is good for Judy's lungs. Sure I never heard her yell louder—" she pushed the three children ahead of her. "It's a blessing that ye didn't wake Patty and Michael. Cats howling wouldn't be nothing at all—if ye had."

Mr. and Mrs. Abbott stood for awhile in the dark watching the house next door and listening to Delia as she stormed and grumbled. She was still protesting as she went up the stairs to her room.

After a while, the lights next door went out.

"Good! Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," Mr. Abbott declared. "The morning will be time enough to mourn the shipwreck of a window."

Mrs. Abbott said nothing.

"Well, I certainly have not lost my knack at pitching," Mr. Abbott observed as he got into bed. "Pretty good, considering that I am out of practice."

His wife still said nothing.

The house, the neighborhood, was quiet again. Just as Cynthia fell asleep, she heard a train whistle. It sounded so strangely unfamiliar, so mysterious, that it filled her with delight. She must remember sometime to tell Peter about it,—he would like to hear it, too. Peter always understood how she felt.



Peter

V

~ *Country Life* ~

THE Abbott children awoke in the morning with such excited clatter that their mother, deciding that further attempts to sleep were useless, got up to find out what they were doing. It was still much too hot! She looked around for her shoes. Then she remembered. Her shoes were out on the lawn!

“Tom! Tom!” she exclaimed to her husband. “My shoes—your shoes—”

Mr. Abbott lifted his head from the pillow and blinked.

“My shoes! Shoes! They are out the window!” his wife told him.

“Shoes,” he repeated sleepily. “Shoes out the window?”

“Yes—you threw them there. We must send the children for them at once.”

Then he, too, remembered.

“David!” he called. “Dav-id—David!”

In an instant, all of his children were in the room. They left him almost breathless as they crowded about him chattering excitedly.

“Come one—come all!” he grinned. Then he continued, “David, go outdoors at once and get my shoes, please. Remember, I threw them at some cats last night?”

“In my pajamas?” David inquired.

“Yes, indeed. That’s the lovely part of living in the country on a hot day. A boy of nine can certainly go out and gather up his father’s shoes in his pajamas without criticism.”

“I’ll go!” Michael offered eagerly. “Can’t I go?”

“All right—you, too,” agreed his father. The two boys dashed from the room, and a few minutes later were standing in the dewy grass under their parent’s bedroom window.

“Daddy-tell-us-where-you-threw-them!” they shouted lustily.

Mr. Abbott rushed to the window.

“There’s—one—there! In that garden!” he called back, equally lustily.

David held up a shoe triumphantly. "I got it. I got it!"

"I want to find a shoe. Let me find one this time. It's my turn," Michael called up in protest.

"O.K. It's Michael's turn. Michael, you get the other one. It's—" he stopped short. He couldn't see another.

"It's over there! Over by that bush!" Cynthia called from another window. Michael scampered, then proud as a peacock, held up his prize.

"Now it's David's turn—"

It was Judy who spied the third shoe. But the fourth was missing. The boys ran around the yard, searching busily but without success. The fourth shoe was gone—entirely and completely gone.

"That's a pretty howdy-you-do for you!" Mr. Abbott complained to his wife. "It happens to be your other shoe."

"You boys stay out there until you find it!" he called from the window.

"Oh!" And Mrs. Abbott put her hand over her mouth in dismay. "That last shoe you flung, wasn't mine—it was yours! And it hit some glass," she went on.

Now Mrs. Abbott leaned out of the window.

"David!" she called softly. "Come right under the window and listen to me. Listen carefully. Look for a broken piece of glass somewhere—a broken pane—"

"I see it!" Judy yelled at the top of her very excellent lungs, from her place beside Cynthia. "It's that cellar window over there—"

And it was.

"That," Mrs. Abbott spoke with great calm, "is where your other shoe is, Thomas Abbott. It's in the cellar of the house next door. And since you are the one who threw it, I suggest that you call in the boys, get dressed and ask the neighbors for it yourself!"

"Must I?" asked Mr. Abbott, sticking his finger in his mouth in very good imitation of Michael. "Must I, Mother?"

"You most certainly *must!* All your other shoes are still packed—goodness knows where," Mrs. Abbott said severely. But her eyes were twinkling.

"I don't want to! Make David go! Make Mike go!" her husband continued to tease.

Mrs. Abbott did not answer. Nor did she have anything to say a few minutes later when David and Michael came trooping back, and her husband emerged from the dressing room fully clothed with the exception of one shoe.

"Well, there's nothing for it, Mother, but that I must go," and Mr. Abbott pulled down the corners of his mouth rebelliously. The children went off into squeals of laughter.

"Higgle-de-piggle-de, my name's Tom. I call on my neighbors with one shoe on!" And, with an exagger-

ated limp, Mr. Abbott opened the door and marched out. The children rushed to the windows, watching him pick his limping way across the stretch of lawn between the two houses. Then he disappeared into the house next door.

"Isn't Daddy funny?" Michael giggled.

"Come now the whole of ye, get dressed," Delia ordered. "And no more nonsense."

The children were not downstairs when Mr. Abbott returned, which was just as well, for he was very subdued and more than a little sheepish, as he walked into the kitchen. "The lady next door did not appreciate the situation as much as your children, my dear," he said to his wife. "In fact, I may say she had no appreciation at all! She followed me down into the cellar and stayed right with me, watching with an eagle eye to see that I didn't pick up anything but my shoe."

Mrs. Abbott sighed. "Did you say, *eagle-eye*?" she asked anxiously. She was thinking of her five children and the extra one that was soon to arrive. Would the lady next door prove to be another neighbor, like those in the city, who did not like children?

"I said—eagle eye! Gimlet eye! Glassy eye! She did say one kindly word, though—she hoped we would never have as upset a night again. I think that was one hope for us, and two for herself. I promised to have someone come and fix the window this

morning. 'That's quite all right. Any time in the next day or so will do,' she said."

"I'll get a man to fix it this morning, if I can," sighed Mrs. Abbott. "Now you must hurry and shave, dear. Remember you have a train to catch."

Mr. Abbott dismissed her suggestion lightly.

"A train to catch? What's a train to catch? Besides, my dear, I can't possibly go wrong this morning. All trains lead to New York."

When he came downstairs half an hour later, he found his family enjoying a sociable breakfast in the kitchen. "Well, well," he smiled as he took a seat on an upturned box, "all here, all accounted for. Happy and gay, for the long summer day."

The children grinned appreciatively.

"Here's your coffee, dear," said Mrs. Abbott. "The train leaves in—"

Once more Mr. Abbott airily tossed aside the small matter of trains. "Train? Don't bother your head for a moment about my train."

Leisurely he drank his orange juice, ate his toast, egg and bacon, enjoyed three cups of Delia's good coffee, and with a gay wave of his hand, went out into the hall.

Then the trouble began. "Where's last night's paper," he called from the front stairs. "Who took last night's paper?"



Followed by Delia and their mother, the children rushed to help.

"Why must you have last night's paper, darling?" protested Mrs. Abbott. "You can buy a brand new one at the station."

"Certainly I must have last night's paper," explained her husband in a long-suffering tone. "I didn't get around to *Mr. Bungle* last night on the funnies page. If you miss him one time, you—"

"Here it is, Daddy," cried David. "Under the davenport."

As he tucked the paper under his arm and put on his hat, Mr. Abbott cast a reproachful glance at his wife. "Under the davenport! Fine place for a newspaper."

Pulling back the front door with a jerk, he halted again. "My bag! Heavens and earth, where is my bag!"

Such a time! And if Delia had not thought to look on the cellar stairs, no telling when he would have gotten to work, Mr. Abbott declared. Then he was off, arms flying, black bag knocking against his trousers, legs a blur of running.

"I like the way Daddy runs," commented Judy. "It's funny."

"Will he do it again tomorrow, Mother?" asked Michael hopefully.

Mrs. Abbott sighed. "I hope not, dear. I sincerely hope not."

She did not know that as long as they lived in the country, her husband's morning departure was to take place in just that way.

When their Mother and Delia had vanished in the direction of the kitchen, the children looked hopefully into the living room.

"Maybe we could all help get ready for Peter," suggested Cynthia. "There's a lot to be done."

It was unquestionably true. The living room was a jumbled mass of big boxes, little boxes, crates, tables, suitcases, and even a trunk or two.

"Do you know what?" It was David, eyes shining with the excitement of an idea. "Let's play climbing the Rocky Mountains. We can be mountain goats and—."

"Or the Alps or the Himalayas!" cried Cynthia. "That big one over there that nearly gets to the ceiling can be Mt. Everest. That's the highest mountain in the world—everyone gets killed trying to get to the top."

"Boy, that will be fun," David agreed.

"Who's going to get killed?" asked Judy.

"You can, if you want to," offered David generously.

"Don't let's play that!" protested Judy but her protest was unheeded. With a shout, the others fell

upon the mountains, clambering, scrambling, as high as they could go, and bleating all the way. Soon even Judy joined in. She was content, however, with the glory to be achieved by climbing up on a moderate-sized packing box.

“Look, Cynthia,” cried David, “here’s the Grand Canyon. If you don’t jump right, you land on—” And he took a flying leap that put him squarely upon the top of the piano.

Out in the kitchen, Mrs. Abbott and Delia had been so absorbed in their search for the dishpan that they had not noticed the bleats and shouts of the mountain goats. But the leap across the Grand Canyon had resulted in too thunderous a landing to be ignored.

“Gracious, Delia!” exclaimed Mrs. Abbott. “What are the children doing now? Tell them to go play outdoors. That’s what we moved out here for.”

Delia arrived at the living room door in high indignation, for the first Grand Canyon leap was being followed by others, no less thunderous in their results.

“Whatever?” she roared. Then her eyes filled with horror at the sight of small Patty about to cross the Canyon. “Someone get Patty! Get her!”

The wild scramble for Patty was attended by shrieks of pain. “Glory be! I didn’t ask ye to pull her asunder. There, there, my lamb! And now, ye spalpeens, ye can—.”

She was interrupted by the loud summons of the

bell. Cynthia hurried for the front door, and opened it upon a pleasantly smiling delivery man who had a bottle of milk in his hand.

“Welcome to our town,” he said to Cynthia with gratifying politeness. “Give this to your mother with the compliments of the Sunnyvale Dairy.”

“Well now, isn’t that nice,” said Delia, who had followed Cynthia to the door. “And us total strangers. I’m tellin’ ye, ye never know what ye’ll find in the country.”

“Cynthia!” shouted David, his eyes again dancing with an idea. “Let’s go outdoors and be explorers. We can’t tell what we’ll find!”

It was, Mrs. Abbott and Delia warmly agreed, quite the best suggestion David had made in many a day.

“We’ll decide where to keep our pets,” Cynthia said, as they all went outside.

But the arrival of a representative from the Midtown Bakery, with a box of cup-cakes—“Compliments of—” changed their plan.

“Maybe it’ll be candy next,” suggested David, sitting down on the top step to eat his cake and looking longingly down the street.

“Or a pet from a pet shop,” Cynthia added. “Remember that pet shop on Broadway, David, around the corner from us? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if a man came along with a sweet little puppy?”

“Or a bunny,” Judy hoped.

“Or a goat,” said Michael.

“There he is now!” shouted Judy. “And I guess he’s got a bunny in his hand.”

But it wasn’t a bunny. It was a plant in a pot, compliments of the Greenbrier florist.

“Only a tiny one,” Cynthia told her mother disgustingly when she took it inside. “The front yard has lots better.”

“I’m sure it was very nice of the florist to think of me,” said Mrs. Abbott, absent-mindedly. “Put it on the table, dear. No, the piano. No, I guess in the kitchen on the window sill.”

When Cynthia returned to the front porch, she found her brothers and sisters out on the front walk, gazing longingly at an empty house across the way.

“There’s a good porch over there,” David was saying.

At once the entire group got the idea. They rushed across the street, swarmed up onto the porch, and were racing gloriously up and down, when a policeman came by.

“Hey, you kids—what you doing there?”

The children stopped in their tracks.

“Come down off that porch,” the policeman ordered firmly.

More than a little frightened, they obeyed. Then Cynthia, separating herself from the others, walked

bravely toward him. "We've just come and we're exploring," she explained.

"That may be. But you're the oldest. Don't you know better than to run on a porch that isn't yours?"

"I guess so," replied Cynthia. "But you see we've always lived in New York, where there were never any porches at all."

The policeman's face softened, and he glanced at the other four, who were standing very still in the background.

"You don't say! No porches. But what you doing here?"

Cynthia turned and pointed in the direction of her beloved tower house. "We live there now," she said.

The policeman stared, as though the house were new to him. "Land sakes alive! You don't mean it! Someone's in the old Bell house after all this while, and a fine family of children at that!"

"That's our house, that's our house," declared Patty, in her favorite sing-song fashion, as she danced up to thrust her small hand into his big one.

"Come here, kids," the policeman said then, "come and sit on these-here steps while I tell you something."

The Abbotts crowded around him. "It's this way," he explained kindly. "I know the fun you have running up and down a porch—got a handful of kids of my own—but even out here, you've got to do things like that where you belong. See? The lady that owns

this house doesn't want anything to happen to it because it's got to look nice in case somebody comes along like your Ma and Pa did over there and wants to live in it, see?"

Patty wriggled, and Michael solemnly looked across the street.

"But I tell you what," went on the policeman with a grin, "seeing as you've just come from New York, I've got an idea. You go up on that porch, the whole five of you, and run up and down and holler to beat the band till I say, *Stop*. I'll stand right down here to see that no harm comes of it."

It was joyous, completely, utterly joyous. And when, at last, the policeman called, "Stop!" and they came trooping down from the porch, he took off his hat and with a deep bow said, "Compliments of the Elwood Police Force. O'Toole is the name."

"Now, then," Officer O'Toole went on, "seeing as you're all set to be explorers, why don't you go walking all around the block to see what there is to see—but not up on any porches, mind—then end up in your own yard and explore that."

"We've got to find a place for our goat," David told him.

"And my bunny," added Judy.

Officer O'Toole scratched his head. "You got a goat and a bunny already?"

"Not yet," answered Cynthia. "But we're going to

get 'em. That is, our father's promised us. But our mother hasn't—yet."

He grinned. "It won't hurt to work out where you're going to put 'em if and when. Good day to you, the whole five of you." And the good-natured policeman ambled off down the street.

When Mr. Abbott arrived home that night—miraculously on the train on which he was expected—he approached his home with the thought that he would have time before dinner to read the temperature on all his thermometers. It was a pleasant plan that was not destined to be carried out. For, with a rush and a shout, his children were upon him as soon as he came up the steps. Such adventures! Such a wonderful, wonderful place to live! Were they going to stay right there the rest of their lives? Please! Please!

"Well, well, isn't this fine!" he beamed when, at length, they were all seated around the dining room table—five children's faces shiningly clean, ten small hands well scrubbed. "Now, then, let's sort this out. You've had a good day, I see. I want to hear all about it."

The children gladly obliged. There was the adventure with Officer O'Toole. There was the grove of trees down the block, growing in groups so that each

member of the family now had a Tree House of his or her own.

“We stayed there quite a while,” Cynthia told him. “It’s just like a Tree Town and you can call out the windows and doors, between trees, to your neighbors and—”

“And we’ve decided where to put the goat, Father,” put in David.

Mrs. Abbott, who had been listening happily to the animated conversation which was flowing past her, looked up in dismay. “What did you say, David?”

Fortunately, Judy remembered something just then. “Why isn’t this the country, Daddy?” she asked. “Mrs. Adams says it isn’t the country.”

“And who is Mrs. Adams?” her father wanted to know.

“She’s the woman next door, whose window you broke this morning,” his wife told him.

“To be sure. Mrs. Adams, is it? And what about the window, my dear?”

“It was fixed this afternoon, and—”

“And I’m sayin’ if it wasn’t for Patty here, it’s a pretty pickle we’d be in. Neighbor trouble already, but for her,” Delia said darkly, as she brought in another plate of bread.

Mr. Abbott put down his fork. “Please! Remember

I have had a long, hard day in the city. Won't someone begin at the beginning? Mrs. Adams lives next door. Her window, which was inadvertently broken by myself, was repaired. Very well. What, then, and when?"

"Well, you see, Daddy," said Cynthia in a grownup, explaining kind of voice, "when the man came to fix the window, we happened to be here, so of course we went over to watch him."

"Of course," Delia put in sarcastically, from her position beside Mrs. Abbott's chair.

"Then Mrs. Adams came out and said, 'Are you all in the same family or are some of you just visiting?'"

"And when Patty said our cousin, Peter Abbott, was coming too—Patty always forgets his name is Morgan—Mrs. Adams asked us what was that—Peter Rabbit?"

"I can imagine that she said it in a tone of hope," Mr. Abbott commented.

"And then Patty said, 'No, he isn't Peter Rabbit, he is just Peter and he is going to live with us' and—"

"And I'm telling ye it was God's mercy, it was, Patty said it. For with that Mrs. Adams picked up the little angel and kissed her, and said she guessed she could stand it, though thank goodness she'd been planning all along to go to the country for the summer."

"That's what she said, Daddy," said Judy. "And you said when we came here it was the country, and we think this is the country and why doesn't Mrs. Adams call it the country?"

Mr. Abbott held his head in his hands. Then he looked despairingly at his wife. "Can you straighten this out, my dear?"

Mrs. Abbott smiled. "Of course. What it means is that even with her window broken this morning, and five children running about and shouting, quite naturally our neighbor was a bit worried, and I'm sure I don't blame her. Then to be told that a sixth was coming, who wasn't Peter Rabbit but a real boy—well, for a moment it seemed almost too much. But she must be kindhearted underneath, for she evidently took to Patty, who acted as an Ambassador of Good Will. She isn't going to be like the people who lived under us in the apartment house, thank goodness."

"No telling what she'd be like if she did live under us," said Delia, with a sniff.

"But she doesn't live under us, and she is prepared to be pleasant—even though she is thankful she is going to the country for—"

"Isn't this country, Daddy," persisted Judy.

"Yes, my darling child. This is the country to us. But to Mrs. Adams, who has doubtless always lived here, there is country that is more so, which is where she is going."

"But she says she hopes we'll not go running through her garden," said David. "And I told her we'd be very careful, and that when we get our goat—"

"By Jove, my dear!" exclaimed Mr. Abbott, slapping his pocket. "I completely forgot. A wire came to the office just before I left. Peter is arriving tomorrow, not the day after."

In the excitement which this announcement stirred up, thoughts of the mysterious goat vanished completely from Mrs. Abbott's mind.

Bright and early the next morning, Peter got out of the ramshackle taxi, and his five cousins surrounded him, all talking at the top of their lungs. And when he tried to walk, his progress toward the house was slow for Michael and Patty walked backwards directly in front of him; Judy and David between them were holding onto one of his arms; and Cynthia had sole possession of the other.

"I am going to get a goat and a goat wagon," David shouted into Peter's ear. But since all the rest of the Abbotts were telling their cousin equally important news, the announcement was lost in the general din.

"And we've got an attic," Cynthia's persistence finally won her cousin's attention. "Look, look, Peter. Look up at our tower."

Peter stopped at once and looked up. Then he drew

a long, whistling breath. "Gee, that's swell, Cynthia. We can—"

"Daddy's going to get my bunnies pretty soon," Judy put in.

But Cynthia did not mind the interruption. She could tell by the expression in Peter's eyes that he felt just as she did, about having a real attic and a tower.

"If you look out one of the tower windows, you can see a robin's nest, filled with baby robins—in that big oak tree," she went on.

But she could not tell whether Peter heard her or not, for just at that moment, he let out a shout of special joy. "Oh, Aunt Sue!" he cried as he threw himself into his aunt's arms. "Oh, Aunt Sue!"

Mrs. Abbott held her nephew close and knew that her mother had been right. Peter had been homesick, very homesick! "There, there, child," she said. But Peter was too choked to reply.

In a moment, Michael clamored for attention. "The attic has eyes in it!" he squealed excitedly. "The back yard has trees in it! The trees have cherries on them!"

"You aren't Peter Rabbit! You aren't Peter Rabbit! You aren't Peter Rabbit!" Patty began sing-songing at the top of her voice. And she wasn't hurt, surprised, nor even disappointed that no one paid any attention to her.

"Well, sure and ye are a big boy now!" Delia, com-

ing out the door, announced heartily. "Ye're a head over Cynthia! My! My, now! Ye are almost a man! Big for twelve!"

"You've got a room all to yourself!" Cynthia's cheeks were a bright pink. She felt as though she were giving the room to Peter, and she could hardly wait for the two of them to be alone together in it. Peter was so much more grownup than David. She and Peter read books—and David never did. It made a world of difference!

"Did you hear what I said about my getting a goat?" David asked as soon as they were seated for lunch.

"Your goat!" Peter laughed in a superior fashion. David was being funny. "I'll bite—who got it?"

"It's a *real* goat," Michael declared. "And I can ride in his goat wagon."

Peter looked at Cynthia. Were they really going to have a goat? For answer, Cynthia tapped her forehead with one finger and shook her head.

"Crazy—that's all!" she added, for good measure.

"Moth-er!" David protested, "Moth-er! Tell Peter you have heard about my goat."

"I certainly have, day in and day out," Mrs. Abbott agreed, and Peter was quick to note a determined glint in her eye. Evidently Aunt Sue was not so sure as David was, about the desirability of a goat. But there

were so many other things to ask about that the goat was soon left far behind.

After lunch, Patty was put to bed for a nap, and the others crowded into Peter's small room. Cynthia was secretly annoyed, for she wanted to talk to Peter alone, but there seemed small chance of it. The younger children were holding on closer than sticking plaster. Oh, well, she would have her talk, anyway.

"You know, Peter," Cynthia began loftily, "this house has the most amazing history. It's practically haunted."

"I said that first!" David put in. "That's my idea."

"What's your idea?" Cynthia asked coldly.

"I said it looked like a haunted house the day we got here," David persisted stubbornly.

"Well, that's not what *I* said at all!" Cynthia contradicted. "I said it was *practically* haunted!" Cynthia had taken a sudden fancy to the words "practically" and "amazing." "And let me tell its history, I know all about it. Delia told me—she didn't tell you."

Cynthia did not say that Delia had had no idea that Cynthia was within earshot when she imparted to Mrs. Abbott the information she had gleaned from Mrs. Adams, while the window was being repaired.

"*Please* keep still, children," Peter spoke quietly and politely. He had been in this house only about an hour, and he couldn't very well assert himself yet.

"And that means you, David. I want Cynthia to tell me the story about this house."

David gulped. The idea of putting him in the same class with the children!

Cynthia moistened her lips, and took a long, deep breath. "Well, it's this way. This house has been empty for years and years. No one would live in it."

"Because it looked haunted!" David put in sulkily.

"*Please*, keep still!" Peter ordered again. His words were still polite enough—but his expression was less so. "Go on, Cynthia."

"A long, long, time ago—" Cynthia went on, her back turned on David, "a man lived here who robbed lots and lots of people of money. He robbed poor widows and orphans of piles of money."

"Poor widows haven't got piles of money," David interrupted crossly. "Nor orphans, either."

"Subside!" Peter scowled. He wouldn't say "shut up" until tomorrow. "Go on, Cynthia."

"Well, he ran far, far away. And to this day no one knows where he is, or where the money is."

"Maybe he hid the money in the attic," Peter suggested. "It's probably all there."

"That's *exactly* what I thought," Cynthia agreed. "But there's a lot more to the story yet."

"How could he go far, far away if he didn't have any money?" David jeered.

"Please shut up!" Peter burst out. Well, he had

put a "please" before that "shut up," he consoled himself. It would have been much better to keep on being polite, at least until tomorrow. But how could he help saying "shut up," when David persisted in being so annoying?

Cynthia gave David a black look. "Well, there's more to the story. This is the most *amazing* part. After this man stole all the money, an old, old woman got this house. She got it because the man stole the money from her. They gave it to her so she wouldn't get *too* mad. And I guess she could get plenty mad, all right, because everyone called her Old-Lady-Witch. Anyway, she owns this house now, and she can't sell it—all on account of the man who stole the money," Cynthia found this part of her own story very bewildering, so she rushed by it. "Well, Old-Lady-Witch is very, very old. Mrs. Adams told Delia so. And they say she lives in a big mansion, all alone with the colored mammy she had when she was a little girl down South during the Civil War."

"The colored mammy must be over a hundred years old," Peter put in. He would not for the world question Cynthia's story, but it was just as well to let her know he could figure things out for himself.

Cynthia nodded.

"That's right! And can you imagine, this old, old colored mammy sleeps right on the floor every night beside Old-Lady-Witch and guards her. Isn't that

amazing? What I think is, Old-Lady-Witch won't sell this house, because she knows where the money is hidden."

"Did the Old-Lady-Witch ever live in this house?" Peter asked with a puzzled frown. Cynthia's story was somewhat confusing.

"No—" Cynthia hesitated. She really didn't know. But rising valiantly to the occasion, she contrived a satisfactory ending, not one word of which had Mrs. Adams contributed. "But she and her faithful watchdog-of-an-old-mammy used to come here and look around when the house was empty. People saw flashing lights in the house at night."

"Why didn't they come in the day time?" David snorted.

"They were searching for the money," Peter said patronizingly. It was what Cynthia wanted him to say, he knew. Then he added in excitement, "Say, I bet they'll sneak back some *night* when we are here."

During this puzzling story, Judy had been turning her head back and forth, back and forth from Peter to Cynthia. There were several words in it which she didn't like at all. But the ones she disliked most heartily were "Old-Lady-Witch." Now she decided to go downstairs at once and find her mother. Not wishing to venture away alone, however, she pinched Michael's arm and said, "Come out in the yard."

Michael pulled his arm away. He wanted to hear more.

"You've got a dirty face," Judy told him, spitefully. "You've got to come and wash it." And she pinched his arm again, harder this time.

Michael let out a loud yelp. "Moth-er—Judy's pinching me."

They could hear Mrs. Abbott starting to run upstairs, then stopping half way up.

"Judy! Michael! Come right down here, immediately. You will wake Patty, and if you do—" she didn't finish, but they knew what she meant.

Judy gave her brother a triumphant look. She was well satisfied. Michael reluctantly followed her out of the room, and down the stairs.

Cynthia, as well as Judy, was well pleased. Now to get rid of David!

"Oh, Peter!" A brilliant idea had come to her in a flash. "I just finished *Oliver Twist*. What did you think of Fagin?" Cynthia watched David out of the corner of her eye. "Wasn't he *awful*?"

"Well," Peter stretched himself out on his bed, his arms under his head, "I think Bill Sykes was just as bad." There was nothing Peter liked better than to talk about the characters in the books he read.

"Did you like *Oliver Twist* as well as *The Tale of Two Cities*?" Cynthia asked, her eyes still on David. "*The Tale of Two Cities* is my favorite. I love the French Revolution," she went on, "don't you?"

David was squirming. He knew right well what

Cynthia was doing. For one thing, she was showing off—and for another, she wanted to leave him out of the conversation. But there was nothing he could do about it. Nonchalantly, he walked over to the window and looked down into the yard.

“It’s my favorite Dickens book, all except *David Copperfield*,” Peter replied. “That’s my real favorite. I saw the movies of it four times, and read the book three.”

Cynthia nodded in a superior way. “Oh, yes, of course. *David Copperfield* is the best.”

She did not admit that she had not read *David Copperfield* three times, that once was quite enough. In fact, she had done some very fancy and skillful skipping during that “once.” She did not read books the way Peter did, anyway. He read every word—every last word! She had seen him reading once, and had watched him when he had been interrupted. He had put one finger on his last word, holding it down tight and fast, as though it might get away from him, before he could get back to it! Cynthia didn’t read the big, thick, Dickens stories that way at all. Blithely she tossed overboard whole pages of words and even characters. Dickens did seem to like to describe so many queer people—she just couldn’t bother her head about them. But when she had finished, she had dozens of fascinating pictures in her head.

Suddenly, David put his fingers to his mouth and

let a shrill, ear-piercing whistle go through them. Cynthia, he was sure, was trying to annoy him. All right, he'd show her.

But Cynthia was not annoyed. She was immensely pleased. "You will wake up Patty, David Abbott, and then you will be good and sorry," she warned him piously.

Sure enough, from below came the prompt call, "David, what did I tell you?"

"Oh, *jinks!*" David kicked one of the legs of Peter's bed and stalked out of the room.

Cynthia was delighted. Now she had Peter all to herself.

"Oh, Peter," she began breathlessly, as soon as she heard David running down the stairs, "you will love it here. It's so much more fun than the city. At night, you can hear train whistles. It makes you feel so far, far, away."

"Train whistles?" Peter looked puzzled. Cynthia looked as if she thought there was something strange and wonderful about them. Peter had heard train whistles all his life,—until he even forgot to listen to them!

"Well," Cynthia faltered, a little disappointed, "well, when we lived in the city, I never heard them. They make me feel like the country."

"They make me feel as though I were going places. I'd feel lonesome if I heard one now. I'd think of all

the cities and places I have been to. Maybe—" Peter broke off and then continued with a brighter thought, "maybe they won't make me lonesome, though. I'm glad I'm not on a train, I'm glad I am here. Oh! That reminds me. Wait till my trunks come, and you'll see the present Grandmother sent me before I left the school. It's a pip! You'll love it!"

"What is it?" Cynthia asked eagerly. Now she was sharing a secret.

"It's a set to make things out of. You make as many as you want. There is some lead, and you melt it and put it into molds. You can have hundreds of cowboys and Indians if you have enough lead. Or you can have hundreds of Mickey Mouses—or all sorts of things. I have different molds. You change a horse into a mouse, or mouse into a horse. You could have a rodeo if you want. Then I have a new fort. That is I guess it's a fort or maybe it's an ancient castle. Anyway, it has a moat around it—and a draw-bridge."

Cynthia jumped to her feet. "Oh, Peter, won't we have fun on rainy days! Come on, I'll show you where we can play. Up on the third floor—in the tower room or in the attic. Come on, Peter, come on!"

Tiptoeing despite her excitement, Cynthia led the way to the door which was closed on the attic staircase, opened it and beckoned Peter to follow. Then, carefully closing the door behind him, she tiptoed up

the stairs. She did not want her mother to warn her about Patty.

“Look!” Cynthia pointed, when they had reached the third floor and were standing in the doorway of the tower room. “Look!

“It is a tower room isn’t it?” she asked breathlessly. “Won’t Grandma love it when she comes?”

Peter looked about, his own eyes as bright as Cynthia’s.

“She sure will! She’ll feel safe up here. Grandmother never feels safe in a hotel room.” Peter looked about with vast approval. “It’ll be fun to play here sometimes.”

“But wait! Wait till you see the attic,” Cynthia had to gulp in order to talk at all, for her excitement seemed to have risen into her throat.

In a flash she was out in the hall again. Darting for the attic door, she opened it with the air and manner of an enchantress leading the way into a dark and mysterious realm.

“Here! Here is the attic!” she said, choked with realization of the importance of her announcement. “See, it’s a real attic. You have to bend down when you get right into it, over in the corners. Be careful of your head.”

Peter followed her, peering around eagerly. Cynthia’s excitement was most contagious.

“See!” she pointed to the rafters overhead in which

there were chinks, through which the daylight blazed. "Those are the *eyes*, David and Michael talk about. The boys are afraid of them, but they come up here just to be scared," she laughed in a superior way. "And there are the trunks. That big one is Grandma's. I do hope we can open it some day. I want to see the Czarina dress."

Peter was walking about, scarcely hearing his cousin. He had ideas. They were coming to him in big bunches.

"Some day, we will have to look for the money," he was saying, talking more to himself than to Cynthia. "The money's the important thing."

"The money?" his cousin echoed. In the excitement of the moment, she had completely forgotten her own story.

"Yes. You know—the money that the man stole. This is just the place for a *cache*," he declared, his brows together in deep thought. This was an interesting speculation.

"Cash? Cash!" Cynthia repeated, quite confused. "Oh, yes—I remember now. But I bet he didn't put the cash here."

"Not the cash. This attic is the *cache*," Peter corrected with an important, but tolerant air.

"Well—" Cynthia faltered, in a complete muddle now, "we can look for it on a rainy day."

"He put this money here, for *his* rainy day and we

will find it on *our* rainy day. That's a good joke. Catch on, Cynthia?" And Peter rolled his eyes around.

"Yes!" she agreed doubtfully. "Let's go down in the yard. It's as hot as fire up here. I am burning up to a frizzle."

"We'll have a lot of fun all right when it rains. But it sure is hot now," agreed Peter.

"I can't wait! In the apartment a rainy day was something just too, too awful," Cynthia tossed over her shoulder as she clattered down the attic stairs with Peter at her heels.



VI

~ *Rabbits* ~

“WELL, well!” Mr. Abbott smiled at Peter that night at dinner. “How do you like us here, Peter?”

“Oh, Uncle Tom—it’s great.”

“Quite a place,” Mr. Abbott nodded, “quite a place. We live on what is called Linden Hill. And coming out on the train tonight, a man who lives here in Elwood told me that the big estate at the bottom of the hill has an old mansion on it that dates way back before the Revolution. You might explore it some day—”

“Can you get *in* the mansion?” Cynthia asked eagerly.

“Well, I really can’t say. There’s a family living there in a few of its rooms. They sell fresh vegetables. By the way, that proves this is the country, doesn’t it? Fresh vegetables grown practically on our block. Who says that this isn’t the country?”

“Oh, Mother, can we go and buy vegetables down there?” Cynthia pleaded eagerly.

“Of course, you can—bushels of them!” Mr. Abbott put in, before his wife could answer. “We are going to have all the fresh vegetables we can get. There is nothing healthier. You can all go down there and cart off as much as you can carry.”

“I know!” cried David. “We’ll use my goat wagon.”

Mrs. Abbott’s fork fell with a clatter on her plate, and she stared at her husband in despair.

“All roads seemed to be blocked these days by a goat wagon, my dear,” her husband told her, sheepishly.

“That’s just what we’ll do!” repeated David, nearly bursting with importance. Then he went on, “I’ve been wondering and wondering how I could help Daddy with my goat wagon. Now I *know*.”

“I suppose it never entered your head you could help me considerably with your Mother, if you forgot that ding-busted goat wagon altogether?” Mr. Abbott ventured.

David looked as blank as the wall.

"Listen, Tom," said Mrs. Abbott decisively, "you must do something right here and now about that goat. It's driving Delia and me frantic. We have it at every meal. And a goat is a most unpleasant animal to have around your table when you are eating."

"Goats don't smell very nice, do they, Uncle Tom? I heard—" Peter spoke up.

Mrs. Abbott held up her hand. "I don't think we need go further into that aspect of a goat, Peter," she told her nephew. "The important thing is to eliminate it entirely from further consideration."

One elbow on the table, his chin resting in one hand, Mr. Abbott was staring up at the ceiling. If this was his lucky day, an idea might come to him at any moment! With his fingers he played a little piano tune on one cheek. Ah! It was his lucky day!

Folding his arms and leaning forward intently, he gravely addressed his oldest son. "David!"

David turned his head hopefully.

"What are you going to be when you grow up? What do you want to be? *Think*—this is a very serious question."

"Why—" David opened his eyes in surprise. "I want to be an aviator." Of course he did!

"Ump!" Mr. Abbott nodded. "Want to break any records?"

David nodded emphatically—but he was quite confused.

“Well! Well!” Mr. Abbott turned to Peter, “What do you think of that, Peter? Doesn’t it beat anything you ever heard of? Here’s a boy who wants to be an aviator—wants to break records—and all he can think of at the moment is crawling along the ground in a goat wagon. Would you say off-hand that being able to hold your seat in a goat wagon would be the best training for a flyer?”

“Why no, Uncle Tom,” Peter answered promptly. “Why no—an aeroplane would be the thing to practise in—”

Mrs. Abbott held up her hand. “Don’t go from bad to worse, Peter,” she warned.

Mr. Abbott gave his wife a reassuring look as he continued to address his remarks to David. “If I could persuade you that an aeroplane would be more appropriate for a future flying hero than a lowly, poky, ancient, out-of-date goat wagon—”

“Oh, yes!” Peter interrupted excitedly. “I know what he’s talking about. Say yes, David. I saw a set once. You can make your own plane. It all comes cut out—you just put the pieces together.”

David’s eyes shone. He had never heard of a set with which you could make your own aeroplanes, but it did sound exciting! Vigorously he nodded his head up and down.

Mr. Abbott let out a long whistle of vast relief, and looked at Peter with great respect. He had never

heard of an aeroplane set such as Peter described. Indeed, when he had introduced the subject of an aeroplane for David, he had quite blindly followed an inspiration. Peter certainly had a head on him!

“Now trust me, David. Something will be done to further your ambition to be a flyer, as soon as I have a conference with Peter. I will bring home from the city the object of your heart’s desire. But on one condition. If, between now and the time I get it, you say one word about a goat wagon—*there will be no aeroplane set!* But of course you won’t. My, how proud your mother and I are going to be of having an aviator for a son. We couldn’t very well boast that the same son once drove a goat wagon, could we?”

David grinned and ducked his head. He was satisfied. His father had spoken to him as though he were as old and as important as Peter.

“Now, how about my bunnies?” Judy exclaimed. “You haven’t said anything about them for a long, long time.”

Mrs. Abbott spoke up promptly. “Of all the pets the children have mentioned, I do think a bunny would be the quietest and the least trouble.”

“That’s quite right,” Mr. Abbott agreed heartily. He was so enormously proud of his skill in removing that bothersome goat from the family that he was expansive with good humor. “A bunny now. Then later on we can try out some of the others. Someone wanted a kitten, didn’t she?”

“Me!” Cynthia answered.

“That’s right—Cynthia wants a kitten. Well, Cynthia—”

“Let’s start with rabbits!” Mrs. Abbott put in quickly.

“When I was traveling on the road with Mother, we had gold fish. Mother carried them with her. They are *very* quiet—” Peter suggested, then added reluctantly, “but not much fun.”

It was just after dinner a few nights later that a ramshackle old Ford rattled up to the curb and stopped in front of the house. Mrs. Abbott, who was sitting alone on the front porch, eyed it in mild bewilderment. An old man got out of the front seat, darted to the back of the car, opened the door, leaned in and pulled out a big box.

Mrs. Abbott’s mild bewilderment deepened to perplexity. Who was he? And what was in that big box? She felt certain she hadn’t ordered anything that had not been delivered. As the man came up the walk, he took off his hat and bowed politely. Then he held up his box confidently—as though something were in it which she was expecting.

Mrs. Abbott stood up. He must be at the wrong house.

“Cool enough now, ain’t it?” the old man remarked sociably as he came up the steps. Then, setting his

box down upon the top step, he grinned broadly. "Well, here you are. Just as ordered."

"Good evening," returned Mrs. Abbott, glancing at the box. "But I haven't ordered anything, I'm sure."

"Not you, Madam—your husband."

A conviction of trouble just ahead swept over Mrs. Abbott. "Not my husband, I'm afraid," she replied. "You must have the wrong house. We have lived here only a very short time."

"That's just what your husband said—a short time. I know this house well—it's the old Bell place," he rambled on, trying to reassure her. Then abruptly, he ceased to ramble and spoke tersely.

"Rabbits. It's them rabbits your husband wanted for your kiddies."

"Rabbits!" she echoed in dismay, looking down at the box which was surely big enough for a whole litter of them! "How many?"

"Just two! Just two! A Pappy and a Mammy. That's what your husband wanted."

"Goodness!"

"Hey there!" the old man called to someone behind her. "Hey there! Got them rabbits for you."

"Peter! Cynthia! David!" It was Mr. Abbott's voice raised high in proud satisfaction. "All of you, come! Come from wherever you are!"

From around the corner of the house, they came tumbling, shouting and laughing. All of them. Everyone from Peter to Patty!

Mrs. Abbott walked back to her chair and sat down.

Mr. Abbott tore the cover off the box, put one hand into it, and brought out a wriggling, brown rabbit. He held it up by the ears.

“That’s the Pappy,” the old fellow nodded. “By rights, a hare. The other one’s the rabbit. I had to go over to Centerville for that there hare.”

“What a whoppo!” David screamed. “Oh, boy, look at him!”

“He’s Judy’s,” and Mr. Abbott turned to his small daughter.

Judy, shaking her head vigorously, backed away. She never had seen anything twist, squirm, and wriggle the way this new pet of hers did! She felt sure that if he kept on squirming and twisting and wriggling, he’d fly out of her father’s hand, leaving his long, furry ears behind him.

“Take him! Hold him, Judy,” Mr. Abbott insisted. “He’s yours.”

“Cynthia can hold him,” Judy offered, as she stood winding up one short pigtail into a snarl around her finger. “I’ll let anyone play with him—.” And she looked around wildly.

Peter was on his knees beside the box now, gently

lifting out a snow white rabbit and holding it tenderly in the crook of one arm. A spontaneous cry of delight from all the others greeted the sight.

“Oh, Mother! Mother!” Cynthia cried, her face aglow. “Look what Peter has! Isn’t it simply adorable?”

Mrs. Abbott stood up with a sigh. Then she went over to look at the “simply adorable” little creature, which Peter was caressing so lovingly. She had no other desire at the moment than to catch her husband’s eye and give him a long look, full of deep meaning. But her husband had no wish in the world to meet her gaze, and with considerable skill he avoided it. He was now sitting on the top step, struggling with the strong, brown hare, which was giving him a terrific thumping with its long, back legs.

The children crowded in on Peter, shouting with excitement. Judy’s voice was high above the others. “Give it to me. It’s mine! It’s my rabbit!”

“You don’t know how to hold a rabbit.” Peter frowned at his little cousin, and looked down at the soft, white, furry creature in his arms. “It’s frightened now. You will scare it to death.”

“Give it to me! It’s mine!” Judy demanded. “Mother, make Peter give me my rabbit.”

“I tell you this rabbit is frightened,” said Peter sternly. “It’s trembling all over.”

“I don’t see why Judy should have the rabbit all

to herself. I didn't get my kitten—" Cynthia contributed. "Let me hold it!"

The old man who had brought the box looked more than a little taken aback. "I guess I'd better be off," he said, uneasily. "But them bunnies is going to be popular. Maybe, too popular—you can't tell."

Mr. Abbott nodded. He had paid the man on his way home from the train, a fact he was bitterly regretting at the moment. If he hadn't been in such a hurry, he wouldn't now have on his hands this big "whoppo," as David had called it.

"Daddy says the brown one is yours!" Cynthia was now informing Judy. "The other one by rights belongs to everyone."

"I don't want that brown one—" Judy protested. "You can all have him. Give me my bunny," and she launched herself at Peter.

Peter's jaw was set. "Aunt Sue!" he cried. "Aunt Sue! This poor, little rabbit is scared to death. Judy doesn't know how to hold it."

"Give—me—my—bunny!" Judy insisted.

"I wacky the bunny after Judy—!" cried Michael, standing on tip toes and looking down into Peter's arms.

"There won't be anything left of him after Judy gets through with him." Peter's expression was more stubborn than ever.

Mrs. Abbott caught her husband's eyes at last.

Then she took Judy firmly by the shoulders.

"Quiet, Judy!" she said. "Peter will let you stroke the rabbit, if you do it carefully. It really is too frightened for anyone else to hold just now."

Delia came to the door—and stood stock still.

"For mercy sakes!" was all she could say.

"That's right, Delia," said Mr. Abbott. "That's what we need—a little mercy. My children are trying to dismember one defenceless rabbit." He arose quickly and, crossing the porch to Delia's side, he transferred his burden to her stout arms.

"You stop that nonsense now, or into a rabbit stew you will go!" Delia declared. But she held the frightened hare so securely that it ceased to thrash about and lay quietly in her arms, though its eyes still roved about wildly.

"So now, ye be after having pets!" exclaimed Delia tartly. "Well, ye'd never know from the sounds that came to me in the kitchen that ye were filled with joy over them. Sure, and I thought that murder was being done!"

Cynthia turned from the group around the white rabbit and said with dignity, "We *are* happy, Delia. And we are going to take good care of our rabbits—you'll see."

In the backyard was an old and very dilapidated doghouse. When she first saw it, Cynthia had pleaded

to have it carried up to the tower room on the third floor. It would, she had insisted, make a wonderful doll house, something she had never been able to have in the apartment and had always wanted.

“Gracious no!” Mrs. Abbott had exclaimed when she was taken out to view the treasure. “Not in the house, Cynthia. It’s old and smelly, and I’m sure any number of fleas are making their homes in it. That tower room is to be Grandma’s when she comes to visit us—and I don’t want her to share it with anyone, much less a flea!”

Looking about for a place to keep their new pets, the Abbott children at once saw in the doghouse a made-to-order rabbit hutch. In the morning, their father told them, they could go to the store and buy chicken wire for a “run.”

There had not been time for Peter to complete the errand, however, when—not long after Mr. Abbott left for his train next day—the ramshackle Ford stopped for the second time at the curb in front of the house. The same old man scrambled out of its front seat, opened up the back door, leaned in and pulled out a box. Whistling off-key, but very cheerfully, he carried the box up the walk, and then looked about in disappointment. There was no one to greet him this time. Whistling a little louder, and a little more off-key, he stamped up the front steps. As he put one finger on the door bell, he cocked his head. Dis-

tinctly, he could hear children's voices high, shrill, and excited as they came to him from the backyard. He grinned, then pressed his finger on the bell and kept it there. That ought to bring 'em, he thought, with a satisfied grin. It brought Delia in a hurry. She opened the door with a bang, then stood still in amazement at the words that greeted her.

"Good morning! Good morning! Daddy sent me up with another rabbit. Bought it on the way to the train. Says, two rabbits for six children aren't right."

"Glory be!" Delia exclaimed, then stood looking at him. Her wits soon returned to her, however, and in a rush. "Mrs. Abbott! Mrs. Abbott! Come quick!"

Mrs. Abbott nearly fell down the stairs at the urgency in Delia's voice. She had been making beds. "Oh, what is it? What is it now?" she asked herself.

"Good morning! Good morning!" the old man sang out blithely. "Here I am again!"

"So I see!" Mrs. Abbott gasped, her eyes riveted on his box. "So I see!"

"*Another* rabbit," Delia hastened to explain. "Sure, and Mr. Abbott doesn't think two rabbits is right for six children, so he sent up another. Now, it's three rabbits for six children—one for every two. One child can take its head and the other its tail, and have a tug of war over it. It will be a quicker and fairer way of pulling them unfortunate beasts to pieces!" she finished angrily.

"Oh, dear me!" Mrs. Abbott laughed weakly. "From what I saw from an upstairs window, I wonder if there *will* be three rabbits for very long."

"Nothing like pets for kiddies!" the old fellow beamed. "That's what your Daddy says, and that's what I say."

"And sure, and that's what I say—*nothing like it*. Nothing like anything, I am after hearing about!" And Delia put back her head, and roared with laughter. "What a joke—it's fit to kill me!"

"This one is the sweetest little fellow you ever saw," said the old man, cheered by Delia's good humor. "Spotty—black and white. You can easily tell him from the other two."

"Not after them children get after him—ye can't be telling 'em apart—" Delia wiped her eyes. "Well, well," she said, turning to Mrs. Abbott, "ye and me has got our work cut out for the morning—here comes Peter with the wire—"

The old man took himself off with a sweeping bow. "So long to you! I'll be seeing you again."

"Not," Delia said under her breath, "if we be seeing ye first."

Beds, dishes, dusting, ironing, and cleaning were of necessity put aside for the rest of the morning. Peter insisted that he was the one to make the run—but all he actually did was to hand Delia the hammer, the nails and the small sticks that had to be used as

uprights. And one thing more—he shot orders in all directions to the other children.

Delia stopped once and pushed the damp curly-cues from her forehead.

“Sure, isn’t Peter going to take after his Uncle Tom? He’s got the same way of being handy. Just hands ye things and gives orders!”

Mrs. Abbott laughed. “There’s no good reason for his taking after his Uncle Tom—they are not related.”

“Under the skin they are,” Delia contradicted cheerfully. “There’s two kinds of men in odd jobs like this, one to do the work, and the other to hand out the tools.”

And although both Delia and Mrs. Abbott had serious doubts about the welfare of the pets, they enjoyed the morning.

On the other side of the hedge Mrs. Adams weeded in her garden—with occasional glances at the strenuous activity next door. When they saw her evident interest the children brought their rabbits for her to admire.

“Do you think you are going to be able to keep that wild rabbit in a run?” she asked dubiously, when she saw the brown hare.

“Why?” Cynthia exclaimed in surprise. “He’s not wild now. He’s getting tamer every minute.”

“Perhaps! I do hope you are right,” Mrs. Adams replied, showing her upper teeth in a wintry smile.

“Are you going to call that big, brown, wild rabbit—Peter after the big boy? Patty told me his name was Peter Abbott—”

Cynthia giggled, as she held the big, brown, wild rabbit very tightly.

“Peter’s name isn’t Abbott—it’s Morgan. That’s a funny joke. Wait till I tell him! Peter Abbott, sounds like Peter Rabbit!”

“It does indeed!” Mrs. Adams nodded, and she returned to even more vigorous uprooting of the weeds.

It was long past noon before the three rabbits were put in their run and the children washed their hands for lunch. Delia bustled about the kitchen, muttering as she went, “Now let them rabbits *stay* in that run—or ye will lose them. I’m warning ye, I saw a big dog up the street, and he looked like a hunting dog. He’d enjoy playing a real game of hare and hounds with that big fellow any minute now.”

Peter and Cynthia looked at each other in horror.

“That’s right!” And Peter turned to his small cousins. “If that hunting dog gets the scent of that hare, it’s good night! No one must ever let that hare get out.”

“Nobody but *me*. I can let those rabbits get out whenever I want. They belong to me.” Judy was speaking. She fortunately had joined the others only in time to hear Peter’s last sentence.

There was an instant uproar. Everyone protested at once, in high and determined voices.

"Judy makes me *mad!*" David's voice came up over the others. "She doesn't own all those rabbits! Daddy promised me a goat, and I didn't get it, and I was very nice about it. Especially when I didn't get the aeroplane set yet."

"And I didn't get my kitten!" Cynthia frowned at her small sister.

"How would you like to be having that rabbit in your arms, Judy Abbott, and have that hound-dog chase the two of ye!" Delia put in, giving Peter a wink.

Judy swallowed hard. "Well anyway—" She didn't quite understand what Delia meant. Then she went on defiantly, "they are *my* rabbits."

Mrs. Abbott put her hand gently on Judy's head. "Let us say the little white one is yours! And that the other two belong to the rest of the family."

Judy looked around triumphantly. "Nobody can touch *my* rabbit! Nobody!"

"I'm going to get some little pets of my own out of my allowance," Peter said.

Mrs. Abbott looked worried. "What's that, Peter? More pets?"

"If you send a box top and ten cents, you get a little turtle. That's a nice, quiet pet, Aunt Sue." Peter looked quite smugly satisfied with his choice.

“And when I get my allowance next time, I am going to get the other one—but that one’ll take *real* money—!” He looked about hoping someone would try to guess what would take real money. “It costs one dollar and fifty cents.” Such a sum, he felt, should completely startle the children. “Boy! That’s money!” he repeated.

“One dollar and fifty cents, whew!” David whistled gratifyingly. “Did you say it was *little* and it cost one dollar and fifty cents? By rights, you ought to get something *big* for that—a big whopoo!”

“What is it?” Cynthia whispered in Peter’s ear. He would surely tell her.

Much as Peter liked Cynthia, he liked making people “guess” even more.

“Guess!” he said with a tormenting grin. “You have to guess.”

They guessed, and they guessed! They guessed puppies, cats, canaries, gold fish and parrots. And when Peter shook his head at all of those, they went on to white rats, monkeys, and ponies.

“I know!” and David’s eyes brightened. “A goat!”

“Oh, no, dear,” Mrs. Abbott protested. “We decided against a goat. Besides, your daddy has ordered that aeroplane set for you. It is just a matter of time, now, and it will be here.”

“Tell us what it is, Peter, please,” begged Cynthia. “Don’t be mean.”

But Peter was enjoying himself far too much to tell his plans just yet. He would not, positively not, tell them the name of the unusual pet that was to cost one dollar and fifty cents! With a tantalizing swagger, he left the kitchen and went out in the back yard.

All that summer afternoon, the children knelt, sat or crouched about the rabbits' run. And despite Mrs. Abbott's earnest cautioning, and Delia's ominous warning of what would happen if they over-fed their pets, the run was soon littered with carrots; cabbage leaves; weeds; some very choice leaves from a pretty bush that hung over Mrs. Adams' hedge; small, green apples, and unripe cherries.

The next morning, although there were plenty of left-overs, the children diligently gathered more "food." Then they sat near the run, watching the rabbits eat. In the middle of the afternoon, however, Peter and Cynthia began to feel tired of the rabbits and their antics.

"You know what I want to do!" Peter's eyes had a glint in them, and he spoke directly to Cynthia.

Cynthia glanced quickly about. Yes, they were safely out of earshot of the younger children. "What?" She hoped Peter was not going to go on with his guessing game. She was ready to do something—almost anything.

"Let's do some exploring."

Cynthia jumped up. "Let's!" she cried, not in the

least caring where or what Peter wanted to explore, so long as they went somewhere together.

“Let’s beat it, before the kids notice us.” And Peter tore around the corner of the house with Cynthia at his heels. In front of the house, they paused to make plans.

“Do you remember that old house where George Washington slept? The one your father told us about? And the old slave house? Let’s find them. They are down the hill—”

No sooner said than done. Peter raced down the street with Cynthia close upon his heels. Her light, brown curls were flying behind her, her gray eyes nearly black with excitement. And a bright pink spot burned in each cheek. Exploring! That was another word she loved!

They did not stop running until they were winded. After they had stood still and had caught their breaths, Peter said, “It’s near here—it must be. See all those trees and things, the other side of that fence? I bet it’s a barbed wire fence.”

“I bet it is!” Cynthia agreed. “I bet it’s barbed wire. Maybe they don’t want us in there!” she gulped. “Maybe they will chase us.”

“I hope they do! It’s fun getting chased.” And once more Peter broke into a run.

Arriving at the barbed wire fence, they stood still and eyed it seriously.

“Look! Look! Peter, the fence is broken down over there. That’s where we can get in. There’s a path—”

Peter held up the strands of wire, so that Cynthia would not tear her dress or tangle her curls. And in another minute they were inside.

“It’s like an enchanted glen!” Cynthia’s voice was singing with rapture. “Let’s make believe it really is one.”

Peter nodded. And they said no more as they raced down a tangled, almost overgrown path. Brambles tore at their legs and hands, but in no time at all, they were out in a pleasant meadow of waving grasses.

“Oh!”

Cynthia stood still, looking about. This *was* the country!

“Daisies—and everything!” was all she could find breath to say.

“It would be fun to come down here and build an underground hut,” Peter thought aloud.

“Or look-out up in a tree.”

“Let’s follow this path!” Cynthia ran ahead. She loved the feel of the long, delicate grasses against her bare legs. “It must go somewhere.”

“Don’t let’s tell anyone about it for awhile,” Peter suggested.

Cynthia smiled happily. A secret! An enchanted glen that only she and Peter would know about.

The path wound around in hairpin curves, and tangles of shrubs and groups of white birch shut out the view ahead, so they were startled and delighted to see, at last, a large mansion ahead of them. They were standing at the top of a grassy knoll, and the old, rambling house lay in a hollow. At the foot of the little knoll, to the left, was a tiny pond.

Cynthia turned to Peter, her face aglow.

"I tell you what! Don't let's go any farther today. We have found the house. That's enough now, isn't it, Peter? We can come back again."

"Yes," Peter agreed. "We've explored and we've found what we were looking for. And it's our secret. We'll come back soon, just by ourselves."

"Besides, they might have a watch dog!" Cynthia spoke thoughtfully.

"You aren't like Judy, afraid of dogs?" Peter's voice had a ring of disappointment.

"Oh, no!" Cynthia protested quickly, "I'm not a bit afraid of dogs. I love them. But suppose they have a bloodhound? I don't think—"

"No!" Peter agreed promptly, "I don't think I would, either—"

They turned and followed their path back to the spot where they had entered their "enchanted glen." Again Peter held up the barbed wire, so that Cynthia's dress and curls would not be ensnared. And when they were both once more outside the fence, Cynthia

drew a long, deep breath of contentment.

“Well, we found it!” Peter spoke with as much pride as though they had just discovered the North or South Pole.

“And we’re not going to tell David, or anyone for a while,” Cynthia reminded him. “It’s going to be our secret adventure!”

Peter nodded. “That’s what I said!”

As they walked slowly up the hill toward their home, they talked very little. When they came in sight of their house, Cynthia pointed. “Look at our tower! I like it. It shines through the trees like—” she paused, searching for the right words. “Well, maybe like the sleeping beauty’s castle did. Maybe!”

Peter nodded, content to play Cynthia’s game. Cynthia had no more difficulty in believing impossible things than did the White Queen in *Alice-in-the-Looking-Glass*. In fact, it always seemed to Peter that Cynthia was even better at the game of imagining than the White Queen. For the White Queen had to *practise* believing six impossible things before breakfast each day. Cynthia needed no practising. Impossible things came naturally to her.

Just as they reached their lawn, Cynthia turned to Peter with a beguiling smile. “What is your pet going to be that costs a dollar and fifty cents?”

Peter had a few seconds’ struggle. He did want to hold out a little longer. But there was no resisting



Grace Irwin

"It's going to be our secret adventure," Cynthia said.

Cynthia at this minute. They had just shared one beautiful secret together, hadn't they? Why not another?

"Well," Peter began, then looked at his cousin anxiously. "You won't tell anyone?"

"Cross my heart!" Cynthia crossed herself wide enough to include both her lungs as well as her heart.

"It's—" Peter paused to give full dramatic weight to his announcement. "It's a baby alligator!"

"A—what?" Cynthia squealed.

"A baby alligator!" he repeated, very much pleased by the effect of his news.

Cynthia stared at Peter in alarm. She had seen alligators many times in the zoo. But it had never occurred to her that an alligator would make a desirable pet. Nor did it now—not even a baby one!

"Are you *afraid*?" Peter jeered.

"Oh—no!" Cynthia denied promptly. "I was just thinking that they are sort of slippery to pet."

"They aren't really to *pet*. They're not sissy things, alligators aren't!"

"They certainly aren't!" Cynthia agreed wholeheartedly.

"And it won't be grown-up for two hundred years," Peter went on.

That was better!

"Where did you sneak off to?" David's voice

broke in on them. "It's not fair, going places without me." He was sitting on the top step of the porch looking very cross.

"We were just around!" Cynthia told him airily. "Just around!"

"Not around the house. I looked and looked and yelled and yelled!" David grumbled. "You never told anyone. You just sneaked," he repeated in bitter complaint. "I'm tired of rabbits. What can they do?"

"Wiggle their noses!" Peter returned. "That's interesting to watch."

"Where did you go?" David persisted.

"Around and around the mulberry bush!" Cynthia sang.

"And in and out the windows!" Peter added.

"You missed it. Delia made a chocolate cake for dinner, and I licked the pan," David told them, and then he felt better.

Cynthia looked up into the blue sky. "Oh, well," she said, "you can't have everything." Certainly a secret with Peter was better, even, than licking chocolate off a spoon.

Only Patty and Judy were faithful to the rabbits the next day.

"Supposing my bunny gets little babies—then you'll be sorry," Judy told the family at lunch. "Because all the babies will be mine."

"For sweet mercy's sake!" Delia exclaimed. "That's what I'd be calling counting your chickens before they was born."

"Mother!" Michael protested. "Will all the baby bunnies be Judy's?"

Mrs. Abbott was really very tired. Getting settled had taken much longer than she had thought it would. "Please, Michael," she said. "And please, all the rest of you, don't mention baby bunnies again."

That there might be baby bunnies was the only interesting possibility that Peter and Cynthia and David could see ahead, so far as the rabbits were concerned.

But that afternoon, when the three of them and Michael and Judy were playing in their grove of trees, Cynthia suddenly let out a squeal of excitement and pointed one wavering finger. The others followed her gaze, and finger. There was Patty walking down the street, and swinging at arms' length, were the two smaller rabbits, one dangling and squirming from each hand.

"Patty!" Peter shouted. As he rushed across the street, the others were close behind him.

Patty did not even turn her head. Continuing on her way with a determined air, she clutched the rabbits' ears a little more tightly—that was all!

Now the others were in front of her, heading her off.

"Patty Abbott, where did you get those rabbits—

how did you get them?" Cynthia demanded sternly.

"Give me my rabbit," Judy insisted, firmly removing her rabbit from her sister's hands.

Patty began to howl at the top of her lungs.

"She couldn't have taken them out," Peter said with a puzzled frown. "She's too little to get over the wire."

"Patty dear, stop crying, please." Cynthia knelt down so her face was level with her small sister's. "Did you *take* the bunnies out of the run?"

"No, I didn't," Patty sobbed. "They were running and running. I caught them—"

"Oh, glory!" Peter cried, "I know what happened. They got out of the run. Come on, everybody. The hare must be loose, still. We've got to catch him or he'll go off and live in the woods."

It was all too true. When they got to the back yard, they discovered that the run was empty. Nor was there a big, brown hare in sight. Feverishly, a real hare and hound game began, with the hounds shouting as they ran, instead of barking. "Here, bunny! Here, bunny!" Delia stood on the back porch, calling orders in all directions. And Mrs. Adams seemed rooted in the middle of her yard, with an expression on her face that would be impossible to describe.

At last, just before dinner, they found the missing hare under the porch of the empty house across the street.



Delia stood on the back porch, calling orders in all directions.

“That was some round-up—” Peter said with satisfaction, when all three rabbits were in the run. “But I still want to know how they got out.”

“That,” Mrs. Abbott spoke firmly, “is something you must all find out as soon as possible. That is, if you want to keep those rabbits.”

“Oh, Mother!” all six protested in a chorus, “Of course we want to keep them.”

“We’ll sit right beside the run tomorrow and spy on them,” David declared.

“But I guess we’d better hide behind something while we spy,” Peter suggested. “They’re smart. They probably won’t try to escape if they know we are watching them.”

“That’s a good idea!” Cynthia agreed. Then she looked sternly around at her younger brothers and sisters. “But you children will have to keep very, very quiet.”

When Mr. Abbott came home, he organized an inspection of the run, inch by inch. There was no break in the chicken wire. All the posts were secure. Nor were there any holes, dug under the wire for exits.

Mr. Abbott scratched his head. “Doesn’t that beat everything?” he said. “There’s no way they could get out—but they did. I guess you’re right, Peter. Spying is the only way to solve it. But meanwhile, we’ve got to make sure they stay put till tomorrow.”

They decided to shut the rabbits in the doghouse for the night, with a board across its door, held in place with a pile of stones.

The next morning Peter took command. He had planned it all out, he said, just before he went to bed. Since no one else had any suggestions, under his direction they went down into the cellar and hauled up the crates and boxes left over from the moving. These were to be barricades behind which they were to hide.

"It could be the American Revolution," Peter said with vast satisfaction. "We are watching the enemy. But by rights we ought to have sand bags."

And he hopped over the wire into the run, and began removing the rocks in front of the board which shut the doghouse. As soon as the board toppled down, he was over the wire again. Then he signalled to the others. And in accordance with his well-laid plans, they took their places behind boxes and crates. Over the top of each was a pair of watchful eyes.

Out of the doghouse hopped the big, brown hare. He looked around sniffing, then decided to eat his breakfast of left-overs. For Peter had argued that if the rabbits found nothing special to eat in the run, they would want to get over, through, or under the wire—whatever it was they did.

Judy's rabbit and the little spotted one tumbled out of the doghouse together. And quite contentedly the

three of them were soon nibbling away at the leftovers with an air of slow determination and satisfaction. Hopping from one cabbage leaf to another, it seemed as though they had no other desire or interest in the world.

Judy wriggled with impatience. She wanted action. She had been watching those rabbits nibble on cabbage leaves for hours and hours, so it seemed—and it had ceased to give her the slightest thrill.

“When are they going to do it?” she asked in a loud whisper.

“Keep still,” Peter ordered sharply.

“That’s what I say!” and David glared at his sister. This new game was fun!

At the moment, Cynthia shared her sister’s feelings. Waiting in silence was trying her patience almost as much as it did Judy’s. She didn’t mind being alone by herself, without anything special to do. She could think what she wished then. But this was different. She had to keep watching those three rabbits eating every snip of cabbage, carrot or blade of grass in sight. She couldn’t think at all.

Suddenly Patty pulled herself to her feet, only to be pulled abruptly back by Michael. She sat down with a thud, and opened her mouth for a howl. But Peter, like a general marshalling his forces, motioned Cynthia to put her hand over Patty’s mouth. It was an attempt that did not have the happiest of results,

for Patty promptly started to kick out in all directions.

“Glory! He’s going to do something!” It was Peter, speaking in a tone that sent delicious shivers of excitement up and down their spines. Even Patty stopped kicking and bobbed up to see what was happening.

The big, brown hare was at the far end of the run, backed against the wire. Peter was right. The hare was going to do something.

He did! Like mad, with huge leaps and bounds, he tore down the length of the run. And when he reached the far end, up he flew into the air and over the wire he went.

Five Abbots and one Morgan shouted at the top of their lungs and made a dash for him. Peter, out in front, fell flat on his face as he dove for the hare. But he caught one of the animal’s back legs in his grasp as he went down.

“I got him,” he yelled proudly.

“Now, look!” Cynthia shrieked. “Look! Look at the other two. That hare’s taught the other bunnies to do the same thing!”

Sure enough, the two small rabbits had gone to the end of the run, backed against the wire—and were now tearing to the other end, exactly as the hare had done. Over the wire flew Judy’s rabbit first, then the little spotted one. It was a matter of moments before they, too, were caught and Mrs. Abbott and Delia had joined the triumphant spies.

“Whew!” Peter let out his breath. “*That’s* something, I tell you! Now we’ll have to have a much higher wire. That’s all there is to it.”

With the rabbits shut safely in the doghouse, Peter and Cynthia went to get the wire, and soon came back with an ample supply.

“Making a run was rather fun the first time,” Mrs. Abbott told Delia, as they laid aside their household tasks to begin all over again. “But this is a nuisance. So far as I am concerned, the rabbits can—” There was no need to say more. Picking up the hammer, Delia nodded grimly.

Later in the day, they all had the keen satisfaction of watching the rabbits make any number of attempts to leap from the run, and fail each time. The wire was too high for them.

Mr. Abbott was more than pleased with their achievements. “You, Patty, were right on the job to catch the rabbits when they got out, in the first place. You, Peter, planned your campaign in masterly fashion. All the rest of you joined in to build a most excellent barricade as the base of your spying operations. And you were alert and quick when the crisis was upon you. I, myself, could not have erected a more workmanlike second-storey to the run than did my most excellent wife and the good Delia.”

“I only hope that now they stay put,” Mrs. Abbott put in.

“Stay put!” replied her husband. “Certainly they

will stay put. They may be bright, smart rabbits, but they have only rabbit brains after all. Not to be mentioned in the same breath, my dear, with the skill and the ingenuity and the intelligence within the heads around this dinner table. I am proud of us. We come to the country where we have never lived before, and we know exactly what to do in any emergency!”

The next afternoon, when the children had once more departed for the grove and Mrs. Abbott was sitting at the kitchen table making out a grocery list for Delia, there was an insistent rat-ta-tat at the back door. It was Mrs. Adams.

“I thought very likely you would like to know where your two little bunnies are,” she said. “The children would be distressed to lose them, I am sure. They are in my petunia bed, and are eating up my seedlings.”

Mrs. Abbott gasped in dismay. “Oh, dear—Oh, dear! Delia! Delia, come quick! Go to the front door and call all the children. Tell them to hurry and help catch the rabbits.”

“Do you think it will be necessary to call *all* the children?” Mrs. Adams asked, anxiously. “If *all* of them chase back and forth over my garden, I’m afraid—.”

“Oh, yes,” Mrs. Abbott agreed hastily, “It wouldn’t

do at all to have six children running over your garden—. Delia, tell only Peter, Cynthia and David to come.”

Mrs. Abbott followed Mrs. Adams out into the back yard, with despair in her heart. How *had* the rabbits gotten out this time? Oh, dear. . . .

Mrs. Adams hurried ahead, and, as she went through the hedge, Mrs. Abbott was just behind her. “Here, bunny! Here, bunny!” they coaxed. “Come, bunny. Come, bunny.”

With serene indifference, the two rabbits continued to nibble the petunia seedlings.

Then Mrs. Abbott completely lost her patience. “They are the stupidest animals!” she said, her voice shaking with exasperation.

For answer, both rabbits hopped out of the petunia bed and settled down in a row of delphinium seedlings.

“Oh, my goodness! My best flowers!” Mrs. Adams’ voice was high and shrill. “Get out of there! Shoo! Shoo!” And she charged violently upon the rabbits, beating her skirt up and down. “Shoo! Shoo!”

“Peter!” Mrs. Abbott called, despairingly. “Cynthia! David! Where are you?”

The two women chased the rabbits out of the row of delphiniums—and into a rose garden—out of the rose garden into the delphinium row once more—out of the delphinium row back into the petunia bed.

The air was filled with frantic cries. "Shoo! Shoo, bunny!—Here, bunny! Peter! Cynthia! David! Shoo, bunny! Get out of there! Come, here! Shoo!"

At length, Mrs. Abbott stood still, panting and gazing in the direction of her house.

"Where *are* those children! Delia!"

Around the corner of the house, six children came racing and shouting. Behind them, urging them on, was Delia, red-faced and determined.

"I had to let the whole of 'em come, Mrs. Abbott. They—"

"Get those rabbits! Quickly!" Mrs. Abbott ordered sternly.

The din was almost deafening for the next few minutes. "Get him!" "Get him!" "Here, bunny!" "Shoo, bunny!" Until at last, the two rabbits were captives once again.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am," Mrs. Abbott said to Mrs. Adams, as the procession led off in the direction of the run. "Your lovely garden! We have always lived in the city, you see. Perhaps we shouldn't try to have pets, at all."

"No, I wouldn't say that was it," replied Mrs. Adams. "Pets are all right. They just take a lot of looking after."

"Like children," said Mrs. Abbott, and her lips trembled as she said goodbye and walked through the opening in the hedge and toward the rabbit run.

How the rabbits got out had already been discovered. "Look, Aunt Sue!" Peter called excitedly. "They didn't go over the wire, but they dug a hole under it."

"Of course! Rabbits do go down rabbit holes—" Cynthia cried. "Do you remember *Alice-in-Wonderland*?"

Mrs. Abbott ran toward the back porch steps and sat down. "Let me think!" she said, weakly. "Let me think!"

"Be off with ye!" Delia ordered, "Yer mother wants to think—and faith she's got plenty to think about—what with them bunnies, and a next door neighbor that turns out to be a first cousin to them people who lived under us at the apartment."

"Oh, no, Delia," protested Mrs. Abbott. "She is very kind. She told me—"

"Sure, there's a many a thing I know without being told. I have second sight, hindsight and foresight. *Now* will ye off? Ye all had such a passion for them trees a few minutes back, I had to fair drag ye all away from them by the hair of yer heads. Yer mother has got to do some real hard thinking."

Reluctantly, and with dragging feet, the children turned to go back to their trees and the games they had been playing among them.

"Wouldn't it be awful if Mrs. Adams was *really* a first cousin to those people who lived under us at

the apartment?" Cynthia was walking sideways, her eyes over her shoulder. "You have no idea, Peter, what crabs they were. We could never do one thing—hardly breathe. They were always complaining—and complaining *and* complaining from morning to night."

Peter looked properly impressed.

"I bet they *are* related. It sounds that way." He accepted the news with mournful pleasure.

That night, Mr. Abbott rushed up the steps and dashed into the house shouting, "Hey, there! Hey there, everyone!"

There was something so urgent, so demanding in his voice, everyone promptly obeyed. From upstairs, from the living room, from the cellar—that was Delia—all came running.

Mr. Abbott was standing in the hall, looking frantically about.

"What is it?" gasped Mrs. Abbott, her face white. "Glory be!" Delia echoed. "Whatever—?"

"Are you all here—every last one of you?" asked Mr. Abbott. "*Everyone?*"

"Oh, Tom!" Mrs. Abbott pleaded. "What is it?"

"Where are those *rabbits?*" he asked, in a low, but very impressive tone. "Where are they now—and who handled them today?"

"The rabbits?" Mrs. Abbott repeated blankly.

"Listen to me. Those rabbits *must go!* I just heard today that if by any chance those rabbits were to get sick, we could all catch a deadly fever from them—*rabbit fever!* You never heard of it, of course. I never did myself, until today. Do you understand? It is *deadly!* Those rabbits must go!" And he looked sternly at his wife.

All Mrs. Abbott could answer was, "Oh!" Just as though for hours, she hadn't been hoping, planning, scheming to do just *that!* The rabbits must go, indeed!

"The Lord moves in a wonderful way his miracles to perform," Delia said piously. "There ye are, children, listen to yer daddy. Sure, didn't I be telling ye this very afternoon that them rabbits was poison, and now yer daddy's taken the words out of my mouth again."

All through dinner, they discussed it. And so well did Mr. Abbott describe the dire effects of rabbit fever, that even Judy made no protest against parting with her pets.

The next day, rabbits, doghouse and the run disappeared in the old man's ramshackle car. And for two days, the children had no pets. On the third day, however, the postman brought "Oscar." Oscar was a turtle the size of a twenty-five cent piece. Peter, his real owner, was generous about sharing him, and all went well for over an hour. Then Oscar suddenly disappeared!

Where was he? Who had him last? Peter thought Judy had had him. Judy said Michael had, Michael vowed David had, David declared Cynthia was the guilty one. Cynthia stormily protested she hadn't had him for five minutes. Charge and counter charge! Only one voice was still—Patty's. Patty said nothing. She neither denied she had had Oscar, nor claimed she had seen anyone with him. She walked about with solemn hazel eyes, her mouth clamped tightly shut.

Suddenly Peter turned fiercely on his small cousin. "Patty, did you see Oscar?"

Patty gulped and tears came to her eyes at Peter's tone.

"Patty, what have you got in your mouth?" Cynthia demanded.

At that, Patty started to run away, but Cynthia caught her by her two shoulders. "Patty Abbott, what are you eating? Have you taken something from the kitchen?"

Patty opened her mouth to let out a howl of denial. And Oscar was found. Patty had him in her mouth!



Michael

VII

~ New Friends ~

THAT afternoon, after the excitement of Oscar's disappearance had died down, Cynthia wandered about looking for amusement. Peter had been sent to his room with a firm command not to leave it until he had written a letter to his grandmother. Mrs. Abbott insisted that he must not, simply must not put off the letter another moment—and Cynthia knew that when her mother spoke in that tone, protest was useless. This was indeed a very different state of affairs from that not far distant one, when Peter had been eagerly, though forlornly, writing to his grandmother every day. Too many exciting things happened from the moment he got up in the morning

until the time he went to bed at night. He no longer had time for letters!

Cynthia glanced down the street. Yes, the younger children were playing among the trees. It would be a good time to read the book Mrs. Adams had lent her. Going up into her room, Cynthia curled up on her bed. The book was very old and it was all but falling apart. Cynthia looked at it curiously.

It was queer about Mrs. Adams, she thought. Delia kept saying over and over that their neighbor, mark her words, was like the folks downstairs in the apartment in New York. But last night, when Mrs. Adams had come to the hedge to ask what had become of the rabbits, and they had told her about the rabbit fever and the rabbits going away, she had been most friendly.

"Do you like to read?" she had asked.

When Cynthia had answered enthusiastically, Mrs. Adams had become very friendly. "I have a very good book that I would like to lend you, if you wish. You can read it yourself, then perhaps your brothers and sisters would like to have you read it out loud to them."

"Here you are!" she said after she went into the house and returned with a book in her hand. "I had this when I was just your age. It did me a lot of good."

Cynthia was so interested in trying to see the title

of the book she did not hear the last, hopeful statement.

The book was called *The Wide, Wide World*. "Is it a travel book?" she asked politely, trying to hide her disappointment. She did not like travel books, at all.

Mrs. Adams looked surprised. "Good gracious, no! Haven't you ever heard of *The Wide, Wide World*? It is a very beautiful story about a little girl named Ellen Montgomery. And it is very sad in places."

Cynthia's eyes brightened at once. "That's nice! I like to cry over books. Some of Dickens' are awfully sad."

"Do you read Dickens?" exclaimed Mrs. Adams.

Cynthia nodded proudly. "Oh, yes. After I saw *David Copperfield* and *The Tale of Two Cities* in the movies, I read them right away. Then I read some of the others."

Mrs. Adams had told the truth when she said *The Wide, Wide World* was sad.

Now, then—and Cynthia curled herself still more tightly upon the bed. It was sad almost from the first page, and as Cynthia read on, there were times when she could scarcely see the printed page for her tears. On and on and on she read. She forgot that Peter should long since have been able to finish his letter, and that with the children off in the grove, the time

was opportune for more exploring in the enchanted glen.

On and on, until—"Cynthia!" her mother called from below. "Cynthia!"

Cynthia did not reply.

"Cynthia!" The voice was nearer this time. But again Cynthia did not answer.

Now Mrs. Abbott was at the door of her daughter's room. And although there was still no answer to her summons, she could hear the sound of sobbing inside.

Mrs. Abbott threw open the door and hurried in. "Why, Cynthia, darling! What is it? Are you sick?"

Cynthia attempted to reply, but her effort was lost in gulping sobs.

Mrs. Abbott was greatly frightened. "Cynthia, please tell me. Shall I send for the doctor?"

With a valiant effort, Cynthia controlled her sobs enough to say, "They—won't—let—Ellen—Montgomery—read—the—Bible—"

Mrs. Abbott stared at her daughter in silence. Then a quick gleam shot into her eyes and she spoke dryly, "I see. It's the book Mrs. Adams gave you to read. Well, my dear, you can't say that your own parents have ever treated you as unjustly as, apparently, Ellen Montgomery's did. Come now, daughter. Get up and wash your face."

As Cynthia put down her book and began to uncurl, Mrs. Abbott turned her face away. So Mrs.

Adams had had a real motive in lending Cynthia *The Wide, Wide World!* Well, she had at least succeeded in her purpose to the extent of keeping one of the six children quiet for the greater part of the afternoon!

"Where's Peter?" asked Cynthia, returning from the bathroom.

"Oh, that reminds me, Cynthia. Did you put Oscar in the saucepan on the stove? Delia says she might have cooked him up in the soup for dinner, if she hadn't happened to look."

"I didn't do it, Mother. But I'll get him. Where's Peter?"

"He finished his letter nicely, and then got a book, too. He's been reading in the hammock—*Huckleberry Finn*."

Cynthia slid down the bannisters. *Huckleberry Finn* was one of the books she had planned to read with Peter. But Peter wasn't in the hammock, nor in the kitchen, whither Cynthia went to rescue Oscar.

"Sure, and how would I be knowing where he's gone?" Delia replied in answer to Cynthia's inquiry about her cousin. "Maybe he got it into his head he'd do what his aunt was after telling him to, and went to the post office to mail his letter. Strange things do be happening once in a while, and children up and do what they're told immejitly."

"I'll go look for him, I guess."

And that was really the way the most exciting adventure of the entire summer started. Less than an hour after she had left, Cynthia returned with cheeks burning in excitement. She had made new friends, right there in Elwood. The first one in the family to do it—and such thrilling friends, too! Wait till Peter heard about her experience. That was just what she had had—an experience!

When she saw Peter, however, her eager steps slowed down. For Peter was sitting on the top step of the porch, sucking a lollipop. Peter was not very generous about a good many things, and when it came to buying candy, at least half the time he forgot to pass it around. This was a real fault which Cynthia had loyally been doing her best to overlook.

But for him to do it now, when they had a secret together, seemed genuinely insulting, especially when the candy was a lollipop. Sometimes she held her lollipop in her hand and waited for Peter to get a head start, so that they would come out even. But it never worked out that way. There was just no gauging the length of time it would take Peter to demolish a lollipop down to its bare bone of a stick.

Looking at Peter now, Cynthia decided that he needed a lesson. Not for anything in the world would she tell such a selfish person her exciting news, especially to the maddening accompaniment of *smack, smack*. She would wait until tomorrow, when they

were all together. That Peter knew nothing whatever about her news, and so could not possibly consider this a slight, did not occur to her. Nor did he seem at all upset when, sitting down beside him, she did not inquire what he had been doing. Calmly and with all the smacking that Cynthia had foreseen, he continued to enjoy his lollipop.

But next morning, immediately after breakfast when the children were lined up on the steps of the porch, Cynthia stood up and made her announcement.

"I was talking to a very, very nice boy yesterday," she began in a voice which cracked with importance. "He lives near here. In fact, he lives right behind us. His yard touches ours."

"How old is he?" asked Peter indifferently, as though it were of no special importance.

Cynthia bristled. "He's *twelve*," she replied hotly. Peter couldn't say being twelve wasn't important. "He's twelve and he's a *boy*."

"What's his name?" David asked, obviously impressed by this new friend—but really not altogether pleased. He felt sure that Cynthia and Peter would claim the stranger at once, leaving him, David, out in the cold again.

Cynthia hesitated. It was the question she was dreading, the one she had planned to avoid until much farther along in her story.

"What is it?" persisted David, quick to notice his

sister's hesitation and to take advantage of it.
"Percy?"

Cynthia frowned, then decided to ignore David. "He was telling me about the school we'll go to in September," she said quickly. "That is, where Peter and I'll go. It's a Junior High School."

"High School!" David retorted scornfully. "You won't be going to any High School when you're only eleven."

"Well," Cynthia admitted, "maybe not in September. But in February I will. I'll be twelve then. Mother says Peter and I will be in the same class."

"What's February?" mocked David.

"February is February," Cynthia retorted, color spreading across her cheeks to the curly tendrils of her hair.

"Go on, Cynthia," Peter interrupted. "Tell us some more about this fellow!"

"He knows a lot of things we've been wishing someone would tell us—about the old place, *you* know." She told Peter this news with a significant wriggle of one eyebrow which completely excluded David. "You know, the *old* place. The before-the-Revolution-place." And she blinked her eyes to indicate that she was telling Peter something which there was no need to put into words.

Peter was instantly interested. "Yes, Cynthia," his nod seemed to say, "I understand. I do, indeed."

David and Judy looked from Peter to Cynthia and from Cynthia to Peter. What was all this about, anyway? David was annoyed. And immediately he repeated his question. "What's his name?"

"He told me the most exciting things about it," Cynthia continued, pleased that she had won Peter's interest and approval.

"*What is his name?*" David hung on to his question grimly.

"Oh, keep still, David!" Peter frowned. "I want to hear what Cynthia is telling me."

"She isn't telling you anything. She's only making faces. I bet she doesn't know his name."

"Go on, Cynthia," Peter ordered, "and, David, if you interrupt again, I'll shove you down the stairs." Peter thrust out his foot in a highly suggestive manner.

"What's his name?" echoed Judy.

"Oh, you might as well tell it, Cynthia," Peter conceded. "Then these kids will stop pestering us."

Cynthia looked altogether miserable.

"His name," she answered slowly, and with great reluctance, "is Agnes."

David broke into a loud shout and his whole body shook with laughter. He rocked back and forth—so violently that he nearly knocked Michael down the steps. Whereupon Michael, who had been listening with open mouth and round eyes, loudly joined in. It was highly contagious laughter, for without under-

standing what it was all about, Judy and Patty both squealed with high glee.

Cynthia had known this would happen—had dreaded it from the start.

“It couldn’t be, Cynthy, it couldn’t be,” Peter said kindly. “Don’t pay attention to them—they don’t know what they are laughing at.”

“I do so!” David got up and went down on the grass, rolling over and over, with continued roars of laughter. “*Agnes*. A boy with the name of *Agnes*!”

“Well, that’s what he said, and he ought to know his own name,” Cynthia snapped.

“Keep quiet!” Peter shouted at David. Then he turned to Cynthia. “Listen, Cynthy—*Agnes* is a girl’s name.”

When Michael and Judy heard this, they shrieked with wicked joy. They hadn’t understood before why *Agnes* had been so very, very funny. It was a little funny of course—all strange names or words were—but not funny enough to cause David to go off into such spasms of laughter. But a girl’s name!

“I know it!” Cynthia answered Peter. “But that’s what he said.”

“Well—!” And Peter whistled. Then he glanced at Cynthia and decided to change the subject. “What color was his hair?”

“Yellow,” Cynthia answered, in a very low voice.

It was the last, the very last straw. Even loyal Peter could barely refrain from showing his contempt.

“He’s a sissy. He’s a sissy! Yellow hair—and his name is Agnes, oh gee!” David hooted, and rolled over and over on the grass again. His sides ached with laughter. This was an occasion! It wasn’t often that he had such a joke on his big sister.

Cynthia glared at him.

“Judy,” she ordered, “go and tell Mother that David is rolling all over the place where she planted the grass seed.”

Judy scrambled to her feet in delight. To be in the center of any kind of argument was joy enough, but now she had her own part to play.

“Moth-er! Moth-er!” she called lustily. “Davy’s rolling on your nice, new grass seed.”

“Go into the house, Judy, she can’t hear you,” Cynthia commanded.

Judy disappeared into the house, shouting as she went.

Cynthia turned to Peter desperately and spoke in a low voice. “He isn’t a sissy, Peter. Honest. He’s quite big—and he knows all about that old house. He told me all sorts of exciting things about it. He and his brother are building a hut down there—you know *where!*” And she lowered her voice until it was a mysterious whisper.

Peter nodded approvingly, but a little patronizingly. After all, *Agnes!*

"Did he say what his brother's name was?" he whispered cautiously.

Cynthia groaned inwardly. This was *awful*. Simply awful.

"Well—" she hesitated, then went on miserably. "I guess I got it wrong—but I think it was—"

"What?" Peter shaped his lips with the question, but did not say it aloud. His eyes were on David who was now sitting upon a spot just beyond where the "nice, new grass seed" was planted. David stared back suspiciously at his cousin and his sister. What were they talking about?

Cynthia's shoulders drooped. "I *think* he said—Alice," she said from behind her hand.

Peter stared at her. Then the loyalty, to which he had so stoutly held, crumbled in a heap. It was too much! David's laughter at its wildest was no match for Peter's then. He hooted, shouted, roared and rocked. He laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks. And even then he didn't stop.

Though he hadn't overheard this latest piece of news, David joined in, with Patty and Michael delightedly adding their own squeals of delight.

It was more than anyone could bear. Indignantly Cynthia moved toward the steps. She wouldn't stay there another minute. She would go up to her room

and read *The Wide, Wide World*. Perhaps when she had finished it, if she were to come down and stand by the hedge, Mrs. Adams would invite her over for a tea party.

"Lookit!" Michael called suddenly. "Lookit there."

Cynthia whirled about and gasped. Coming up the walk was a sturdy, blonde-headed boy of twelve, with a broad grin on his face.

"Hello there!" this stranger shouted, not in the least disturbed by this cool reception. "Here I am. I couldn't get over sooner."

Cynthia, utterly miserable, could not reply. Then with a swallow, she stuttered, "Hello, hello."

Her new friend sat down, uninvited, on one of the steps of the porch, and looked with friendliness into Peter's face.

Peter felt himself weakening. This boy was a blonde, it was true, very blonde, and what was more, his hair was curly, but there was something so likable and real about him, that before Peter realized what he was doing, he had grinned back.

"Well—?" asked the stranger, looking from one face to another. "When do we start?"

Cynthia gave Peter a swift, timid glance. She was pleased and relieved to see that her cousin was now looking at her new acquaintance with friendly curios-

ity. Her heart leaped with pride. She had discovered someone in Elwood that Peter liked!

"Start—where?" Peter asked.

"Didn't Cynthia tell you?" the boy asked. "She said yesterday you wanted to go off exploring the old Van Winkle place. She said you were going on a crusade or something," he explained, with a roll of his eyes at the word "crusade."

Peter shot an accusing look at Cynthia.

"Yes!" Cynthia's words tumbled out eagerly, "You know, Peter, we *were* going on a crusade down there. You were going to be Richard the Lion Hearted and I was going to be Robin Hood."

Peter flushed, then turned his head toward the strange boy, for whose good opinion he was now most eager. "I was reading about Robin Hood the other day, and Richard the Lion Hearted was in it," he explained lamely.

The boy grinned broadly, showing a row of white, healthy teeth.

"Never heard of that Richard, but it's O.K. I know about Robin Hood."

"What's your name?" Cynthia burst out. "Is it—?"

"Angus," replied the boy promptly. "Angus MacGregor. Better call me Gus, though. Or anything, but call me early for meals," he finished glibly, with another grin.

“An-gus!” Peter repeated. He was enormously relieved—and, with a smile as broad as Angus’s own, he went on, “Cynthia said your name was *Agnes*. Can you *imagine*?”

“Good *night*!” And Angus went off into a roar of laughter, in which he was at once joined by David as well as Peter.

Cynthia smiled faintly. She was, she felt, having a most disappointing morning. Now her new friend was laughing at her.

“What is your brother’s name?” Peter sputtered.

“Alastair—Alastair MacGregor. We call him Allie though. What did Cynthia call *him*?”

“Alice!” Peter returned with a hoot of derision. “*Alice*.”

Cynthia tried her best to join in. “I thought your last name was Stair—” she tried to explain.

“Wait—wait—till I tell Allie!” gasped the new boy. “That’s a pippin. It’s a good thing you’re a girl, though, for oh, boy!” and Angus shook his head from side to side. “Allie is smaller than I am, but he sails right in.”

“How big is he?” David asked eagerly.

“Bigger than you, huskier than you. He’s ten.”

“Only one year older, though!” David was jubilant.

“Why didn’t you bring him over?”

“He’s down at—” Angus lowered his voice, “he’s down at our hut. I’ll take you there. No one knows

about it. It's in a secret part of the Van Winkle place."

The front door opened, and Judy stalked out. With a wriggle of importance, she delivered her mother's command.

"David! Mother says you are to get right straight off the grass seed this *very*, very minute."

But David had long since left the grass seed, and with great satisfaction, now, he waved his small sister away.

"Run away, Judy! Run away! Don't bother us—we're busy!"

"Well!" Judy took a long breath and turned to Peter. "And, Pet-er! Delia says to come and get Oscar right now if you ever, ever want to see him again. She nearly got him in the vacuum cleaner and she says if she does it will smash the vacuum cleaner to pieces. And you'd better come right straight this minute." Judy's head bobbed up and down for emphasis, as she turned her back upon them and strutted back into the house.

"Oh, *heck!*" and Peter stamped across the porch. At the door, he turned. "I'll be out in a minute, Angus, and then we can get started."

Michael, who had been very quiet and wide-eyed during the conversation, now stood up. "I am going to go, too!" he stated defiantly.

No one paid any attention to him. All eyes were on Angus.



With a wriggle of importance, Judy delivered her mother's command.

"Is the Van Winkle place the old revolutionary mansion?" David asked their new friend. "You and Peter seem to know all about it," he added to Cynthia reproachfully. "You never told me one single thing!"

Cynthia only smiled teasingly.

Peter came out of the house, holding out his hand, with Oscar in it.

"Here he is!"

Angus looked at the turtle with respect and admiration.

"Jinks! A turtle! What a little one! You can get hundreds of them in Martha's Pond, down at the Van Winkle place—but I never saw one so little or with such pretty colors."

"Do you want it?" Peter burst out with a sudden generous impulse. "You can have him."

Angus was delighted. "Oh, thanks! He's a beauty. I can put him in our fish tank. Mom won't let Allie and me have any pets but fish, because they are quiet and stay in one place. They don't 'run around and get under foot, thank goodness,' she says." As he spoke, Angus looked down at Oscar lovingly. "Allie'll like him, too, all right."

At Angus' words, a strange and delightful feeling swept over Peter. Never before having shared anything that was the apple of his eye, like Oscar, he did not recognize the feeling, did not know it to be the happiness of very great generosity. For Cynthia was right. Peter was inclined to be selfish.

“Let’s get going,” he said quickly, in a loud voice. “And if you kids are bound to come along, I suppose you’ll have to. But you’ve got to behave yourselves.”

In an instant, and with never a thought for Judy and Patty who were still in the house, they were all racing up the street. Michael, at the rear, kept up as best he could on his short, fat little legs.

Angus talked breathlessly all the way. He, too, was having a new experience. For never before had Angus known the incomparable joy of so large an audience, one which hung on his every word. He had never realized how wonderful the old Van Winkle place was until he attempted to describe it to these city-bred children.

“It was built way, way before the Revolution, the house was. The Van Winkles were Dutch—and awfully rich. They had slaves. Wait till you look inside the slave hut! Have you seen the river? I bet you haven’t! It runs for miles. And there were lots of other big mansions just like the Van Winkles’ all along it. And wait till you hear this!” he stopped, drew a long breath, and looked from Peter to Cynthia.

“What?” asked Cynthia, her eyes glowing with excitement. “What—tell us.”

“The old Van Winkle mansion had a staircase in the hall, so wide that lots of people said that a team of horses and a carriage could drive right up it. Some bet one way, some another—”

"Gosh!" Peter exclaimed. "But what do you mean, *bet?*"

"They bet that the team and carriage could go up to the stair case—" Angus said dramatically.

"It sounds like a book. Do you read books?" Cynthia asked eagerly.

Angus shrugged his shoulders. "Some. I like the Submarine Boy series. They aren't bad. I have fourteen of them."

"Oh, they're all right!" Peter admitted. "I used to read them myself."

"Who lives there now?" Cynthia was absorbed in the Van Winkle mansion.

"The Setons—they sell vegetables and things."

They were now close to the barbed wire fence.

Cynthia turned to Peter. "Oh, Peter, this is where we went in that day—do you remember?"

"What day?" David frowned.

Cynthia wrinkled up her nose and made a face at David. But she said nothing.

Angus stood holding the barbed wire so that they could all crawl through—holding it as proudly as though he were opening a door to honored guests in his own home.

"And—" he went on, just as though he had never stopped, "and wait till you see the cupola, that's the little tower on the roof of the mansion. Boy! is there a story about that!"

As they ran down the winding path, Angus told them the story.

“They say that a hermit used to stay up in that little tower, all the time. And—”

Cynthia stood still. “And—what?”

“And he would come out of one of the windows on the roof and lower a bucket on a long rope. Every day!”

“What for?”

“For his food. They’d put it in the bucket and then he would pull it up. But no one went near him. He wanted to live that way. Well, one day he didn’t lower the bucket, so after awhile the folks that gave him his food broke down the door. There he was, with his beard caught in the floor boards, so he couldn’t move. He never shaved, you see. So he couldn’t lower his bucket after his beard got caught and he was nearly starving. He was a miser. He had piles of money there—all in gold, except a pail of bank checks that he had never cashed. They were *very* old, and they had interest on them. You’d be surprised, how much interest you get on a check you don’t cash for years and years.”

Cynthia stared at Angus. Was he teasing her? “Honestly, Angus?” she asked, doubtfully.

Angus gave her a swift glance—and what he saw in her face filled him with glee.

“Well, that’s the story—take or leave it,” he replied airily.

Cynthia promptly decided to take it. It was a rather silly story—but she could fix it up, later on.

Completely hidden from sight in a thicket of bushes, they discovered Angus' hut.

"Give the pass word," called Allie, from within.

"Mud-in-your-eye!"

"Enter!"

Allie was so much like Angus that it was funny. He was shorter, of course, and his hair was a little more on the sandy shade, but otherwise they might have been twins.

"You give me a pain!" he reproached his brother. "I've been waiting—and waiting."

"Look!" Angus held out his hand. In the palm Oscar was crawling. "Isn't he a beaut? We can have him for the fish tank. This guy—Peter his name is, gave him to me. He *bought* him."

"Oh, b-boy!" Allie stuttered. (Allie stuttered a good deal, they soon discovered.) "Oh, b-boy! You—you—can have this whole—whole—bunch—for him," and he pointed to a pail on the floor of the hut.

Michael knelt down by the pail, and David, Peter and Cynthia leaned over it eagerly.

"Oh, boy! Oh, boy!" David echoed Allie's shout. "Eight big whopoos! Look at them, *eight* big turtles. Oh, boy!"

"You couldn't give me *all* those turtles!" Peter protested. Such generosity was beyond believing.

“Oh, that’s *nothing!*” Angus swept his protest aside. “We can get dozens more down at the pond. Besides, we hate to leave them here at night. They might get away.”

“Why don’t you take them up to your house?” Peter asked, puzzled.

“Our mother won’t let us! Sure, take them all up to your house. Then we can come and look at them, whenever we want.”

“But I won’t own them *all*,” Peter declared. “I’ll take care of them, but you can own half of them.”

“That—that will—be—swell!” Allie stuttered, beaming his thanks. “Let’s get some—some more this morning. We could get some fishes, too, in the pond—and some tadpoles.”

“Gosh, I think your mother must be awfully kind to let you have all these animals—” Angus turned to Cynthia.

Cynthia nodded proudly—although she was not too sure her mother would like this aquarium.

“And say, Pete!” David turned to his cousin as an inspiration of his own came to him. “You can put your alligator in with them.”

Angus and Allie stared at their visitors in open-mouthed wonder. They were quite speechless. Had they heard the word—*alligator*?

“Oh, sure, I’m getting an alligator,” Peter told them. “It’ll be here almost any day now.”

Cynthia was delighted with the hut. It was so cosy—so hidden from the world. The roof was a combination of an old oilcloth table cover and an even older poncho. And to enter, one had to bend away over, in the first place—and then take two steps *down*. It felt *almost* underground. Her thoughts were punctuated with emphasized words. And it was almost *dark*. It felt *mysterious*.

“We didn’t have to dig down very far—” Angus looked around proudly. “We picked this spot because it was in a hollow. But it’s just for now. What we really wanted was an underground hut, so we’re going to make that next.”

“It’s nearly an underground one, all right,” Peter agreed warmly. “And wouldn’t it be fun to camp here—and eat our meals—”

“And cook them!” Angus added. “Oh, boy! That’s what we’ll do!”

Soon they were all sitting in a huddle on the boxes in the middle of the hut and making plans—all except Michael who couldn’t leave the turtles alone. He picked up one big fellow—its head and legs all wriggling—and pushed it into Cynthia’s face. Pulling back with a horrified squeal, she shut her eyes tightly. The other boys shouted, and, inspired by Michael, each of them fished up a turtle from the tub and tried to make them crawl on Cynthia’s head, and then on her back (which she turned at once, in a frantic effort to get out of the hut).

Safely outside, Cynthia dashed through the tangle of bushes which surrounded it. Once out in the clear, she stood still. And when the boys caught up with her, she had a broad grin on her face.

Angus looked at her in astonishment, then decided that Cynthia was not only the prettiest girl he had ever seen in his life, but the best sport. It would be mean to go on teasing anyone who grinned that way after she had been so frightened. Angus liked it, though, that she had been frightened—just like a girl!

“Let’s put the turtles back in the pail, and then go down to the pond and get some more,” he suggested. “As long as you’re going to have an aquarium, you might as well have a good one.”

Angus hung back with Peter as the others raced down the trail toward the pond.

“Cynthia’s swell, isn’t she?” Angus said, looking up into the sky. He had never praised a girl before.

“Sure!” Peter answered with prompt loyalty.

For the next hour the boys waded into the muddy water of Martha’s Pond, and collected turtles and tadpoles. But Cynthia sat on a big stone, thinking of the story Angus had told them. Through the trees she could see the cupola, and it fascinated her. Had a hermit really lived in it?

When they left for home, the boys were carrying a pail filled with dirty water, eleven turtles, a dozen or so tadpoles, and one small frog (the prize catch of the morning).

As they parted, Peter turned to Angus with warm friendliness in his voice.

“Gee, it was swell of you to give us all these things. I’ll take good care of them. Don’t worry!”

“Oh—that’s O.K.!” replied Angus, casually. “Glad to do it. I’ll be seeing you.”

David looked after the two MacGregor boys as they hopped the fence into their own yard. “Jinks, they’re swell, aren’t they?”

“They sure are!” Peter agreed.

Just as they got over into their back yard, Angus put his hands to his mouth, made a megaphone of them and shouted:

“THANKS FOR OSCAR!”



VIII

~ *Turtles and Tadpoles* ~

“LET’S get the turtles all fixed up, before we show them to Aunt Sue. If we showed them to her right now, it might worry her—or something. Anyway, I bet she’s too busy helping Delia get lunch.” Peter was standing looking down into Angus’ pail, with Cynthia, David, and Michael hovering over it, out in the back yard near the cellar door.

David spoke up suddenly. “You know—what?”

“Know—*what?*” Peter asked promptly.

“I’ve got a good idea.”

“All right, spill it. I need one,” Peter looked at his cousin hopefully.

“It’s not Monday—that’s my good idea. Catch on?”

Peter gave David a withering look.

“That *is* a bright idea. It’s not Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday—it’s Friday.”

"Don't you catch on? Monday is washday," David persisted.

Peter continued to look at his cousin in silent scorn.

"Monday is washday," David went on undaunted. "Monday, Delia uses the tubs in the cellar. And we could use one of—"

Peter's eyes brightened. "Not bad! Not bad, not bad," he said, promptly picking up the pail and starting for the cellar steps.

Cynthia, David and Michael were just behind him, and in no time at all, eleven turtles, a collection of tadpoles, and one frog, were made to feel at home in one of the wash tubs.

The children were all sitting quietly on the back porch—looking happy, satisfied and proud of themselves—when Judy came whirling around the corner of the house. When she caught sight of them, she walked toward them slowly. Never on any face was such extreme misery and unutterable reproach so plainly marked. It was, for one thing, marked in dirt and tear stains. Her face was criss-crossed with as many lines as a map, with zig-zag boundary lines here and there and everywhere.

Her lips were quivering and, with difficulty she refrained from breaking into sobs. Slowly she climbed the steps, her big, sad eyes looking more and more woeful, and her small, round chin wobbling suspiciously. It was quite apparent that she did not

intend to talk to any of them. Crossing the back porch, with her nose in the air, Judy trotted silently toward the back door.

Peter and Cynthia looked at each other in dismay. They had forgotten all about Judy for hours!

"Judy!" Cynthia called. "Judy, we have something to show you. Wait till you see."

Judy stuck her small nose up higher into the air, shut her eyes tightly, opened the door, and went into the house.

"Jinks!" David exclaimed. "She's mad."

Peter and Cynthia nodded guiltily.

"Let's give her a turtle," David suggested.

Then Delia stuck her head out of the door. "Come in to lunch, the whole of ye—but go up and wash first."

Silently and promptly, they started to do as they were told. But as they trailed across the kitchen, Delia let out a shriek.

"Glory be! Where have ye been? Rolling in a mud bath? Davy! Michael! Stand still!"

The two boys stood looking up at Delia guiltily.

"Mud, mud, *MUD*—from one end to the other of ye. When ye are upstairs, ye take off them suits and get into something else! I'll put 'em to soak in the tub and, faith, they need it."

Peter gave Cynthia a wink—and as they walked shoulder to shoulder out of the kitchen, Cynthia whis-

pered in his ear, "Did you hear what I heard? *In the tubs*. I wonder how she will like the aquarium!"

"She won't mind. She can use one of the other tubs down there." Peter to show that he wasn't worried, began to whistle.

Uneasily, Cynthia returned to the thought of Judy. Poor Judy—they had forgotten her. But they had raced off while she was in the house—they hadn't left her behind *on purpose*. She had just been unlucky, that was all. This idea cheered Cynthia a little, although she still felt guilty. It wasn't anyone's fault, she told herself. Besides, Judy would have been scared stiff by Angus' story about the hermit.

"Where have you been all morning?" Mrs. Abbott asked pleasantly, as soon as they were seated at the dining room table. "There was no one around but Judy and Patty."

"You ran *away*—you ran away!" Patty wailed. "You ran away from Judy and me." Patty had been smiling when she sat down at the table, but her mother's words recalled the loneliness of the morning.

"Oh, Mother, we never noticed we didn't have Judy with us—we started in such a hurry," Cynthia explained quickly. "We didn't wait for anything."

"Well, what was it—a fire?" Mrs. Abbott smiled. "After all, nothing else could call for such headlong haste. But after this, I want you to come and tell me

where you are taking Michael. He is much too young to wander off for hours with you older children without my knowing just where he is."

"Oh, Aunt Sue!" Peter hastened to protest. "We didn't really *take* Michael. He just ran after us. Judy could have run after us, too, if she had been around."

There was a second's uneasy silence at the mention of Judy.

"I was helping Delia," Judy told them. "But no one called me—no one called me at all." And her voice quivered.

"We didn't call *anyone*, Judy," Cynthia said. "Honestly, we didn't."

"You see, Judy, it's just as I told you. The others did not intend to run away from you," and Mrs. Abbott gave her second daughter a reassuring smile. "They didn't intend to hurt your feelings." Cynthia sighed with relief.

No one heard Delia go upstairs to get the boys' muddy suits, or pass the dining room door a few minutes later, and everyone was startled when she rushed in from the kitchen.

"Glory be to goodness, Mrs. Abbott! The cellar is alive—it's *crawling*! I wish ye'd see! Ye never saw the likes of it. Ye'd better be calling up that Mrs. Carstairs who is owning this house! It's a sight to shatter the nerves of the best. *Crawling*—that's what the cellar is!"

“Oh—my—!” And Mrs. Abbott jumped to her feet, and hurried toward the door. “Oh my, oh my!” she kept repeating frantically.

Cynthia and Peter both hurried after their mother in guilty dismay as Delia led the way down into the cellar. The other children were close at their heels, Judy last, her eyes dark with fright, but her curiosity forcing her on. *Crawling* things in the cellar! Whatever could they be? She shivered.

“*There*, and what was I after telling ye!” Delia exclaimed, pointing dramatically into one of the tubs. “I can’t think of anything but that that pesky Oscar’s name should have been ‘Lena,’ and she laid her eggs in that tub. But sure, and I never saw anything hatch out and grow like these, if that be the case. They wasn’t here Monday. The tubs must be healthy for them, for they’re all growed a hundred times bigger than their mother in a few days. By this time next week, they’ll be so big ye won’t be getting into the cellar, for the size of them!”

Mrs. Abbott peered into the tub, then turned and faced her children.

“To whom do these turtles belong?”

Peter swallowed hard, then answered, “Some of them are ours—the others belong to Angus.”

“Angus?”

“Yes, that is the boy we were telling you about, at lunch. Half of them are ours—the other half really

belong to him, and Allie. The frog is mine."

"The frog?" Mrs. Abbott echoed. "Is there a frog, too?"

"He's there, all right," Peter reassured her. "He's very little, that's all."

"And why—" Mrs. Abbott asked with ominous self-control, "are these turtles and one frog in *my* tub?"

"We couldn't think of any other place for them, where they wouldn't get out," Peter answered reasonably. He should have thought his aunt could see *that!* Where else could they have put them?

"You couldn't have put them by any chance in Angus' wash tubs?" and Mrs. Abbott raised her eyebrows.

"Oh, no! Oh, no, Aunt Sue! Mrs. MacGregor won't let Angus and Allie have pets. She won't let them have the turtles even in the house. But I bet even she will like Oscar."

"Now—what—do ye be thinking of that?" Delia put in witheringly. "So this Mrs. Gregor won't be after having her wash tubs used for them filthy beasts, but your mother's just dying to have them."

"We cannot have your turtles here, Peter!" Mrs. Abbott said firmly. "Not under any condition. Nor can you be the caretaker of Angus MacGregor's turtles."

"Why, Aunt Sue!" Peter protested. "Why, Aunt Sue! I promised him! I promised him I'd take good

care of them. I can't break my promise, can I?"

Mrs. Abbott looked at her nephew thoughtfully, and slowly her eyes lighted with amusement.

"I suppose it was a gentleman's agreement, that you guard, keep and cherish his turtles?"

Peter nodded and went on, "I can't go back on my word, can I?"

"Oh, Mother!" Cynthia appealed, her heart torn with concern. "Angus was so nice. He gave us those turtles—all of them. He didn't want to keep even one for himself. But Peter and I wouldn't let him—we didn't think it was fair. It's awfully hard getting them out of the pond—and he and Allie had so much trouble getting them."

"Well—" Mrs. Abbott drew a long breath and looked at Delia. By this time, Delia's own eyes had the glimmer of a smile in them, and her face was puckering up with mirth.

"Sure, Mrs. Abbott—honor is honor—there's no getting away from it. Peter's an honorable young gentleman."

"But where can we put these treasures, Delia? They certainly can't stay in these tubs."

"They certainly can't—that's the truth!" Delia agreed heartily.

Peter and Cynthia, their faces betraying their worry, looked from their mother to Delia. The fate

of eleven turtles, one frog, and a collection of tadpoles was hanging by a thread!

“However in the living world did ye get them beasts up here, I’d be asking?” Delia wanted to know.

“In Angus’ pail,” Peter returned sadly. He was quite discouraged.

“Would Angus be so kind—and I am thinking he must, or he’d never have given ye them creatures in the first place—as to let ye keep them in *his* pail?”

“Oh, but, Delia!” Peter protested. “They would be too crowded if they had to stay in a pail all day.”

“Maybe Angus would be good enough to let them spend the night in it—if not the days. In the days ye might be after letting them run a bit in the back yard. But not on washday—” she added. “I don’t want them beasts under me feet when I am hanging out the clothes. I ain’t gotten over the feel of them yet, since I put me hands in the midst of them, unsuspecting!”

Mrs. Abbott let out a long sigh. “Dear me! *What will happen next?*”

But Michael solved the problem to everyone’s satisfaction. He had been wandering aimlessly around the cellar, and beside the coal bins, he had come upon an old wooden tub. It had been left there by the former occupants of the house, many years before. “Look, Mother!” he said. “This could be for the turtles.”

“Why, of course!” exclaimed Mrs. Abbott in relief. “But take it out of the cellar, in case it leaks.”

Late that afternoon, Peter came in to his aunt with his face aglow. “Aunt Sue, Angus and Allie said to tell you that you are wonderful. They think you’ve been very kindhearted about those turtles.”

Mrs. Abbott’s face was a study, as she said, “I am very proud that Angus thinks I am kindhearted to your eleven turtles and one frog!”

“And, Aunt Sue, may we go down to the Van Winkle’s place tomorrow—and stay all day—and take our lunch? We have a pile of work to do on the hut. We are going to make it more underground, so we’ve got an awful lot of digging to do. May we?”

“Who is ‘we’?” she asked with a smile.

“Davy and me. Cynthia doesn’t want to go. She says she can’t dig and I don’t think she can, either. Do you?”

“No, I wouldn’t say that Cynthia could—or would, now you ask me. Yes, you may go.”

“Oh, boy!” Peter let out a whoop of joy. This was going to be more fun than he had ever had in his life.

Cynthia was entirely agreeable to the departure of the boys the next day. The idea of doing nothing but digging did not appeal to her. She much preferred waiting to be “surprised,” she told them, and see the underground hut when it was done. Besides, Angus

had brought her his favorite Submarine Boys book to read. Handing it to Cynthia with genuine pride, he had assured her that if she liked books at all, she would surely like this one.

Cynthia liked boys' books, and besides she couldn't disappoint Angus—he had been so very kind. After David and Peter had left to call for Angus and Allie, she threw her bed together (it looked passably smooth on top), tossed her clothes onto their hooks, and then relaxed in the porch swing with the *Submarine Boys in South Sea Waters*.

It was, she decided, very fortunate that she had hurried, because Angus came over to say goodbye, and was obviously pleased when he saw what she was reading.

"Where are you now?" he asked. "What's Dick Wentworth doing *now*?"

Cynthia looked up. "He's eating a banana," she told him.

"Well—that's *nothing*! It gets good and exciting in the next chapter," he promised her, as he waved goodbye.

Cynthia soon found that Angus was entirely correct. It was most exciting in the next chapter, so much so that she began to wind locks of hair over and over on her finger until her head was in a tangle. She always did this when a story was so full of suspense that she could scarcely wait to finish it.

After awhile, Patty and Judy and Michael appeared, having decided that only on the top step of the porch could they amuse themselves to fullest advantage with their turtles.

Cynthia tried putting her fingers in her ears to shut out their chatter, but the book kept falling over and she kept losing her place. At last she snapped crossly, "Oh, run away, can't you? I can't read with you jabbering your heads off."

Judy retorted in a firm tone, "We don't want to run. We want to stay right here."

It was too much. With her book under her arm, Cynthia went into the house. "I'm going up to my room," she called back to them. "And you needn't try to bring your turtles up there, because I shan't allow it."

Anyway, Cynthia consoled herself as she walked upstairs, her tower room was the most ideal place in the world when you had an exciting book.

Blissfully, she read on and on. And as she read, from time to time she would look up and cock her head apprehensively. She expected any minute to have her mother call, telling her to run out-doors to "play." Only the night before, Mr. Abbott had said he thought his oldest daughter was doing too much reading these bright summer days.

The boys did not return to the house until just before dinner that night—tired, hot and happy.

Angus, David and Allie were shouting a song at the top of their lungs as they marched up the street, and Peter was whistling (or what he called whistling).

Angus came up on the porch, and sat on the railing. Cynthia was once more sitting in the swing.

"What is Dick Wentworth doing now?" he asked as he kicked his legs against the spindles.

"They've been exploring an old gold mine, and they think maybe they've found a big, gold nugget."

"Boy, isn't that part swell? Say, Cynthia, how do you like orange cake?"

"I love it!" Cynthia answered. "Why?"

"We're going to have it tonight for supper, and I'll bring you a piece to the hole in the fence in the back yard—way over—" he pointed. "Come and get it when I whistle." He jumped to his feet, then hesitated. "Cynthia, don't you think it would be a good idea for us to take all the turtles and the tadpoles and the frog, if he's still here by tomorrow, back to Martha's Pond and turn 'em loose? I think they'd like it a lot better there than here in a tub that leaks so there isn't much water left by morning, even if we fill it up at night."

Cynthia looked at Angus fondly. "I think that is one of the nicest, kindest thoughts anyone ever thought," she declared. "I think that's just what we should do. Besides, Judy and Michael and Patty are much too young to know how to treat turtles."



For the artist

Angus grinned. It might be a job to convince Peter and Allie that they didn't want an aquarium, but Cynthia's approval was worth it. "And wait till you see our hut. It's a lot of work and it's awfully hot digging. But we're going to have a hut that'll accommodate everybody when we get through." Angus paused, to make certain that Cynthia appreciated that word *accommodate*. Then, satisfied, he continued, "And we're not going to take much lunch tomorrow because Peter says we're to make believe we're wrecked on a desert island. We're going to scout around for our food. You're sure you don't want to come with us, Cynthia?"

Being wrecked on a desert island was decidedly alluring, but she remembered Angus' words about the hot digging just in time. She wouldn't want to go and then shirk. Angus wouldn't think much of that, what with his always saying she was such a good sport.

"No, thank you, Angus," she replied. "I'd better stay home and help Mother with the children."

"O.K. So long!" And Angus hopped the railing and disappeared.

Next morning, Cynthia began to read Peter's *Book of Pirates*, for she had finished Angus' book the night before.

"That pirate book," Peter said as he went off, "must be exciting as the dickens from the pictures. I haven't read it yet, myself, you know," and was glad

he had brought out the book for Cynthia. "Did I tell you I'm Robinson Crusoe today and Angus is my man, Friday—and he says Allie and Davy are Tuesday and Thursday."



IX

~ *Green Watermelons* ~

Two mornings later, the boys announced that the time had come for Cynthia to see their underground hut. They would leave at once, to get everything ready, and she could come in about an hour.

“Of course you may go with them, Cynthia,” her mother told her. “But you must take plenty of food for lunch. The boys have been so vague about their lunches, and it has really worried me. Peter keeps insisting they don’t need much, that they are playing Robinson Crusoe and are living on a desert island.

They have walked off with several of our pots and pans, too. Mrs. MacGregor, it seems, has also loaned them some cooking utensils. But what have they been cooking? I wish you would find out."

Cynthia felt very grownup at having her mother talk over the boys with her in this way.

"How about the turtles?" she suggested. "People eat turtle soup, don't they?"

"Perhaps," Mrs. Abbott said. "But my impression is—"

She never finished her sentence. For just then the doorbell rang—first with two short calls, then as if a finger were on it, and was being kept there.

"My stars! Who got glued to that bell?" Delia grumbled as she went out of the room. "Coming! Coming! Take it easy!" she muttered.

Mrs. Abbott stood up in alarm. There was something almost menacing in the insistence back of that ringing. And she hurried out into the hall, with Cynthia at her heels.

Delia threw the door open, her face red with indignation. The strident ringing of the bell ceased at once, only to be followed by a worse uproar. The two men on the porch both began to talk at once, and bitter protests and accusations issued from their lips.

"I'll have the law down on them boys!" at length came clearly from the wordy tumult.

"What boys, I'll be asking ye right now?" Delia blazed.

"The boys that live right in this house," a tall lanky man with a mop of unkempt hair, retorted hotly. "They're right here this minute, I'll bet."

Mrs. Abbott came to Delia's side, her eyes filled with distress.

"What do you mean?" she said, with such quiet dignity that both men took off their hats at once. "What boys—and what have they done?"

"What ain't they done—" the tall, lanky fellow began. Following Mrs. Abbott who motioned him to a porch chair, he sat on its edge, twirling his hat between his knees.

"I am sorry, madam, but them kids has done *plenty!* This man here knows about it, too—and his brother is a cop. First off, I was going to get his brother, and have him take them kids to the town hall."

The other man nodded, but his expression was softening. Mrs. Abbott was very sweet and pretty, and by her quiet manner, he felt she was a real lady.

"No need to talk so loud, Reggie," he said. "Just speak to the lady, nice and quiet. But I can't blame Reggie for being riled up, ma'am," and he coughed apologetically. "Tell her who you are, Reggie, so she'll know."

"My name is Reginald Seton. I live down at the Van Winkle place—"

Delia, who had been standing quietly by, gave Mrs. Abbott a significant nod.

"Yes?" Mrs. Abbott said quietly. "And what have the boys done?"

"What ain't they done," Reggie repeated, his face blowing like a red balloon. "Dug up a row of potatoes, that's what. Tramped all over the rest of the vegetables, too—"

"Could you name the boys?" Mrs. Abbott asked.

Reggie bellowed, "Yes, ma'am, I can that. One of them said his name was Robertson Caruso—and the others said they was Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. I believed the Robertson one, but not the others. No, ma'am. Fresh as fresh paint, they was."

"There are three boys in this house, my two sons and my nephew," Mrs. Abbott told him. "But their names are David and Michael and Peter."

"Where is they now?" Reggie asked in renewed suspicion.

"The house has been unusually quiet this last half hour—I can't believe they are around," said Mrs. Abbott. "I shall have to wait until I see them—I want to be sure they are my boys."

"Tell the lady how you know, Reggie," the other man ordered. "Tell her!"

"Sure, Tim—I was getting to that! Well, those vegetables has been going for two days. I've been watching and watching. Yesterday, they made off with four big squashes."

"Squashes!" Delia put in. "Squashes, you say. It

ain't any boys in this house then. They would starve before you could get them to eat a morsel of squash—let alone four big ones.”

“Four big squashes—I’ve been watching all summer. Never tried that kind before. They wasn’t even ripe,” Reggie snorted hotly. “And this morning, what do you think I seen?” he turned to Mrs. Abbott dramatically. “You’d never guess.”

Mrs. Abbott waited.

“I’ll never get over it—what a sight! You can’t imagine how I felt, Tim—” Reggie shook his head at his friend.

“Tell her, tell the lady!” Tim ordered.

“Across the field—I seen it with my own eyes—one of the boys untied Rose,” he sputtered wrathfully.

“Rose?” Mrs. Abbott gasped, completely at sea.

“Yes, Rose! My nanny goat.”

“What did the boys do with the goat?” Mrs. Abbott asked sharply.

“Led her right up the hill, dragging her by the rope all the way,” Reggie roared.

Delia grasped the porch railing and looked about frantically. “I knew it was no use, Mrs. Abbott. A goat was certain for sure to get here, one way or another,” she declared.

“That’s where I came into the story,” Tim put in, eager for Delia’s attention. She was a very fine figure of a woman, he thought. “I was going down to see

Reggie and buy some vegetables—and I met this kid dragging poor Rose up the path. I heard Reggie yelling—so I started to yell. Then the kid let go, and flew like old Nick off in another direction. Just after that I met that MacGregor boy.”

There was an uncomfortable pause. Delia and Mrs. Abbott looked first at each other, then back at Tim.

“He wouldn’t say aye, yea or nay, for awhile. Then, at last, he admitted he had taken two or three potatoes. When he did that—he admitted a bushel. And before I knew it, off he scatted.”

“Have you seen Mrs. MacGregor?” Mrs. Abbott asked, still hoping against hope that it might all be a mistake.

“Sure, I did!” Tim answered promptly. “She has no more ideas about it than you have. She says she doesn’t know where her boys are. Says they might be with the Abbott boys—”

“Tim and me found out that the MacGregor boys has been thicker than thieves with the new boys in the old Bell house. That’s this one. And thicker than thieves is right.”

“Are ye sitting there and calling our boys thieves?” Delia blazed, in a sudden hot tempest. Delia could grumble about the boys herself—that was her privilege, she felt—but let anyone else do it!

“Hush, Delia!” Mrs. Abbott ordered firmly. Then turning to Reggie Seton, she said, “I am afraid you

are right, that my son, and my nephew have been up to mischief. They have been playing every day this week with the MacGregor boys down at the Van Winkle place."

"Playing!" Reggie snorted—but he lowered his voice. He felt better. Mrs. Abbott was admitting—something.

"When I see my boys, I shall talk this over with them. And I want you to tell me just how much they owe you—for the vegetables they have taken."

Reggie was so surprised by his sudden victory that he stood up and fumbled with his hat more nervously than ever. He was most uncomfortable.

"It ain't that so much, ma'am," he said. "A bushel of potatoes or so ain't anything. It was those squashes. I never tried to grow 'em before. They wasn't even ripe—."

"They never took squashes!" Delia snapped. "They hate the sight of 'em. That must have been some other boys. Ye can't pin squashes on our boys—"

"Ask 'em!" Reggie retorted sullenly.

"I shall tell the boys not to play down there again," Mrs. Abbott promised.

"Oh, that ain't at all necessary," Tim answered with a smile. "Don't try to keep your kids out of that Van Winkle place—even the barbed wire won't do it. It's just for them not to bother down around the old

mansion. That's what the Setons pay rent for. They know, the kids do, what's wild, and what ain't."

"How much do we owe you?" Mrs. Abbott repeated. "Tell me and I will see that you are repaid."

Reggie Seton shuffled his feet back and forth. "How about fifty cents?" he said, hesitantly. "They did walk on some vegetables they didn't carry off."

"And if ye get fifty cents from us, see to it that ye'll be after getting fifty cents from the MacGregors," Delia ordered grimly.

"Sure!" Reggie returned rather miserably. "It wasn't that they took such a lot—but they shouldn't have untied Rose. That made me real mad—on account of her giving us milk for our baby. And them squashes! That cut me up no end—I was waiting all summer to see how they turned out!" And he shook his head forlornly.

"Ye still got to prove it to me, them kids took your squashes—" Delia declared. "Ye don't know I wore meself out only this time last week getting them to even put squash on their plates, much less ate it."

"Good day, Mr. Seton," Mrs. Abbott said, rising to conclude the interview. "And I shall send my boys to you. Perhaps we can buy our fresh vegetables from you from now on. My husband said, when we first came, that he wanted vegetables from your place—"

"That's mighty nice of you, ma'am," broke in Tim.

"All's well that ends well. There is no hard feeling now, I hope?" And grinning at Delia, he and the disconsolate Reggie went down the steps.

All through this scene, Cynthia had been standing by, silent and frightened. Once the men had gone, she rushed back into the house. She must find the boys at once!

Delia followed Mrs. Abbott through the door, muttering as she went.

"Squashes, no less! Imagine that! Umph!" she snorted derisively, "*Squashes!*"

"How *can* I find the boys?" Mrs. Abbott asked distractedly.

"Don't you worry, ma'am," Delia said, as she started up the stairs. "I am going up to me room, and change me dress—then I'll go and find 'em for ye."

She was going into her room on the third floor, when she heard a noise. A strange, muffled noise. Glory be to goodness! Was that tower room "haunted" as the children insisted it was? She stood listening. The door to the tower room was shut. Her heart turned over, then righted itself. It was a good heart and a stout one. Holding her lips tight together, she bravely marched to that closed door and threw it open. Then her eyes opened wide.

"Well!" and she put her hands on her hips. "So there ye be!"

Yes, there they were—Angus, Allie, Peter, David and Michael—playing as nicely and peacefully as anyone could wish. The four older boys were on the floor, while Michael was lying across an unmade bed, the bed bought especially for their grandmother. His head was hanging over its edge, and he was watching the older boys intently. At Delia's voice, they all looked up and smiled.

"Hello, Delia!" Peter spoke up cordially. "We are trying out my set for making lead cowboys and other things."

Delia stared at the lighted plumber's candle, and blinked. It didn't seem possible. She couldn't believe her eyes.

"Where have ye been this long while? How long have ye been up in this room?" she demanded, after she got her wits and her tongue back.

Peter and David exchanged puzzled, inquiring looks. How long had they been up in the tower room? They really couldn't say—not for the life of them.

"Well, now!" Delia's face was now very grim. "Ye might as well be taking them innocent butter-wouldn't-melt-in-yer-mouths looks right off yer faces. It don't fool me none at all. Yer mother's waiting for ye. She's just after saying goodbye to Mr. Reginald Seton and a man by the name of Tim. Tim has a brother, no less—who is a cop—if that might be giving ye any ideas!"

Angus jumped up. "Well, we've made about sixty cowboys—I think that's enough. Allie and I'd better get going."

"I think that's well spoken, Mr. MacGregor—and yer point well taken," Delia said tartly. "But there's just one question I am burning with curiosity to ask ye all. The rest of the matter will be taken care of by yer mothers. When did ye, Peter, and ye, David, and ye, Michael, get this burning passion for squashes? Or was it the MacGregor boys, by chance?"

The boys, filing silently out of the door, stopped still, and exchanged looks of blank amazement. *Squashes!* What was Delia talking about?

"Squashes!" Peter echoed. "What do you mean, *squashes*? We don't know one single thing about squashes, do we, fellows?"

The others shook their heads violently.

"Stop that silly head-wagging!" Delia snapped. "Ye took four *squashes*—out of Reggie's garden. And it broke his heart."

"We never touched his old squashes!" Peter retorted hotly. "What would we do with squashes?"

"Oh, no, Delia!" But Angus was exceedingly polite. "We never touched a single squash. We don't even know what one is, do we, fellows?" and he turned and looked from face to face.

"All right! All right, I believe you!" Delia told them with satisfaction, as she noted their honestly

inquiring expressions. "I knew that crazy loon didn't know what he was talking about. Squashes, no less! You hate them ripe, and cooked nice,—and why ever in the living world would ye want *four* of them—*green* and—" She stopped short. At the words—*four of them—green*—there was a startling change upon the faces looking up into hers, an unmistakable look of enlightenment and guilt.

"Four—green *squashes*!" Peter repeated in an uncertain voice. "We saw—some—we had some—green watermelons. We didn't have *squashes*—" he faltered. "Maybe, that's why—"

"And we couldn't eat those watermelons," Angus finished in a rush. "Nobody ate them."

Delia stood still and stared down at the boys, while tiny, little wrinkles puckered up her eyes, eyes that now had a shadowy twinkle in them.

"So ye couldn't eat them watermelons, eh?" she asked quite solemnly, in spite of that shadowy twinkle.

Angus and Peter shook their heads.

"They were the worst watermelons I ever tasted in my life. No one would have bought them," Peter commented a little sulkily, as he and the others followed Delia down the stairs.

"I have an idea no one would have bought them green things—for *watermelons*. They would have waited until they turned yellow, and then would have bought them for *squashes*," Delia chuckled softly.

“And I’m after wondering this blessed minute whose hearts was most broken over them green squashes—that Reggie creature, or a few boys I know right well!”

“I think Allie and I better go home—” Angus said again, when they reached the first floor.

“I’ll be agreeing with you, Mr. MacGregor. We’ve got business to attend to around here—” Delia declared.

If only his aunt had scolded them, Peter thought, as they sat around the dining room table to talk the matter over. But she didn’t scold—she just sat there speaking quietly, and in such a sad, disappointed kind of voice.

“I trusted you boys,” she said slowly. “And the fact that you have lived in a city until now is no excuse. You knew that there was a vegetable garden near the old mansion, and that the vegetables in it did not belong to you. You knew that Mr. Seton sold his vegetables. If you wished to have the fun of digging your own potatoes to cook, you had only to see him and buy the potatoes in the ground. You, Peter, certainly knew enough for that. And you, David. Besides, Angus and Allie live here. I cannot understand it.”

She paused, but the three boys did not speak.

“And one more thing,” she turned to David, “I am just as positive as though I had been there that it was you, David, who untied that goat. Your daddy prom-

ised you an aeroplane model set to take the place of a goat, and you told him you would not bother about one, any more. Do you think that is fair, son? He went to a great deal of trouble to order a special set for you. Do you think you ought to keep it when it comes?"

"Oh, Aunt Sue!" Peter protested, distressed almost beyond endurance by the misery in his cousin's face. "It was my idea. We were only going to borrow that goat and milk it. We were playing Robinson Crusoe on a desert island. Robinson Crusoe would have milked a goat if he had found one."

"But Robinson Crusoe would not have borrowed a goat tied to a post in the back yard of an old mansion."

"We made believe the mansion wasn't there," David faltered.

"In that case," Mrs. Abbott replied firmly, "and since you were so successful at making believe that the old mansion wasn't there, why couldn't you have gone farther, and have imagined that the goat wasn't there, either? But we will say no more about it now. Your father will decide tonight what is to be done."

Out in the kitchen another meeting was taking place. Delia was sitting in judgment over a very troubled Cynthia.

"It's those MacGregor boys I'm blaming more than

our three," Delia declared, swinging open the icebox door. "And stupids they must be, living here all their lives and not knowing a squash from a watermelon."

"But, Delia—" Cynthia began.

"No buts to it, I say. Just ye wait till yer father gets home tonight. There'll be doings between here and the MacGregor house, I'm telling ye."

But Mr. Abbott surprised everyone, even Mrs. Abbott. He didn't roar at all. After he had heard the whole story, squashes, goat and all, he just looked very tired and a little sad.

"And I trusted you boys," he said, in Mrs. Abbott's very words. "Trusted you to play as you wished, here in the country, without troubling others."

Peter swallowed hard at the lump in his throat. "You can trust us from now on," he said in a very small voice.

Mr. Abbott looked at his nephew keenly. "I hope so," he replied. "But what can we do to make up to Mr. Seton for the damage you have done?"

"We can pay for the vegetables out of our allowances," David suggested.

"Yes. You can do that."

"And we can pay double for the squashes," Peter added.

"Yes. I would say that would be only fair, in view of his disappointment. But there is something else, too."

"Apologize. They can go and say they're sorry and won't do it again," Cynthia put in.

"Exactly. Apologize. As soon as dinner is over. We want our neighbors here in Elwood to be as glad we came here as we are. We want them to be glad we are going to live here for—"

"The rest of our lives!" shouted Judy.

For the first time since they had sat down at the dinner table, Mr. Abbott smiled. "Yes, for the rest of our lives, we hope," he told her.

Now Delia, who had been standing eagerly by, had a suggestion of her own. "Begging yer pardon, Mr. Abbott," she said, "I'd be making them MacGregor boys go along for that saying they're sorry, and paying some, too."

"Yes, you're right, Delia. The boys and I will go over to the MacGregors together for a conference, first. And I have a feeling that Mr. and Mrs. MacGregor will agree with our decision."

As the boys and their father trooped from the dining room when the meal was over, Peter paused at the door to glance back at his aunt. She was sitting at her place, with shoulders that drooped, and her face still looked sad.

Rushing back, Peter threw his arm around her and whispered, "I'm so sorry, Aunt Sue. I just didn't think. And it really was lots more my fault than the others. I'm older."

Mrs. Abbott reached up and patted Peter's hand. "I understand, Peter. And I know you will be more thoughtful next time."

"That was generous of Peter," Mrs. Abbott remarked to Cynthia as the front door slammed. "Sometimes I have thought him a bit selfish."

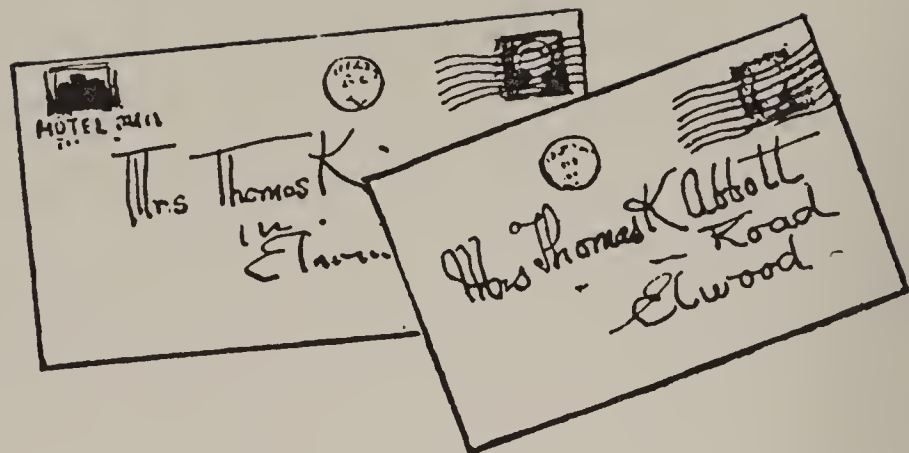
"Sometimes I've thought so, too," Cynthia agreed. "But I guess it's just because he doesn't think. Anyway, he's lots better than he was."

"Yes, I hope—"

"That we live here the rest of our lives!" shouted Judy again, eager for attention.

"I guess you won't find Delia and me wishing to move very soon again, will they, Delia?"

"Move! Glory be, don't say *that* word, Mrs. Abbott. Don't say it!"



X

~ Two Letters ~

NEXT morning, when Cynthia opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was the heavy rain, beating upon the bedroom window.

“Oh, dear!” she exclaimed in disgust. “Oh, *dear!*”

Last night, when the boys and Daddy had come home, she had thought she could not possibly wait for today. Mr. Seton had been so nice!

“A very fine, a most understanding man,” Mr. Abbott had declared. For not only had Mr. Seton accepted the boys’ apology, he had even been unwilling to take their allowance money, advanced by Mr. Abbott. And when at last he reluctantly put the money in his pocket, he had offered to let the boys help him dig potatoes and even to milk the goat, whenever they wished.

“Boys will be boys,” he kept saying. “I’d have

remembered it myself this morning, 'cepting for them squashes."

It had been arranged that they were all to go to the old Van Winkle place the next day, and now it was raining!

But as Cynthia got into her clothes and listened to the water splashing and beating in torrents against the window and rushing down the drain pipe by the front porch, she found her disappointment washing away with the rain. Why, this was just the kind of day they had been waiting for—to play up in the attic and the tower room. They'd get Angus and Allie to come over and have lots of fun!

Looking back upon it all afterward, Cynthia never could decide whether that day was a nice one or a bad one. It was so mixed up. First, the news that Angus and Allie brought. The MacGregor boys came over the first thing to tell their friends that tomorrow they were going to the "country" for the rest of the summer. They only stayed for a few moments for they had to hurry home to help with the packing. Peter and Cynthia and David and Michael and Judy looked dismayed at this sudden development.

"But this *is* country, Angus," Cynthia protested.

"Not according to my Mom and Dad," Angus told her. "Well, we've got to get going, fellows. So long!"

Feeling disappointed, hurt, cheated, Cynthia

watched the door close upon them. Then she followed the other children up the stairs. Just when everything was all fixed up, this had to happen!

For the first time, the tower room held no enchantment for any of them. Peter and David lay on their backs on Grandma's bed, looking gloomily up at the ceiling.

"Oh, jinks!" grumbled David. "If it hadn't been raining, we could have gone down to the hut again before Angus and Allie left. I wish my aeroplane set had come."

"And my alligator never got here in the mail, either," said Peter. "It's a gyp."

"Maybe we could play with those cowboys and Indians you made yesterday," Cynthia suggested half-heartedly, from her place beside Michael on the edge of the bed.

"I'm going to play, too," declared Judy crossly. "You can't leave me out."

"Get off my feet, Michael," commanded David, giving Michael a push that sent him flying.

Michael set up a lusty howl.

"This isn't any fun," declared Cynthia. "I'm going down to my room and read *Little Women*."

"And I'll go with you and read *Captains Courageous*," Peter decided, pushing himself up from the bed.

David and Judy looked at their cousin and sister

apprehensively. Did they really mean that they were not going to play?

But Cynthia did not walk out the door. Listlessly, she crossed over to the window and gazed out at the storm.

The others waited in silence.

“Oh, Peter!” Cynthia broke the unusual quiet. “It is mysterious, being up here in the tower when it’s raining like this. You know, I almost feel as though I were in a lighthouse in an awful gale.”

Peter sprang into action. “I say, fellows,” he cried, “let’s get out my new castle and that ship Grandmother sent me and—”

“And use the cowboys and Indians we made yesterday,” interrupted David excitedly. “We made sixty-five and there are enough to divide up and even give Michael and Judy some.”

Already Cynthia and Peter had dashed to the closet and were dragging out some big boxes. And as Peter set to work upon his castle, he gave rapid orders. “The rest of you stay up on the bed while Cynthia and I manage this. We’ll each have a leader. We can call him an admiral, like Admiral Byrd. We’ll make believe that Admiral Byrd has got awfully sick of freezing at the South Pole and he wants to get to the South Seas where there is warm weather. Don’t call these Indians or cowboys, fellows. They’re just the admiral’s followers. See?”

Feverishly, Peter and Cynthia set the scene. The other three, enthralled, lay on their stomachs, with their heads hanging over the edge of the bed. Peter and Cynthia could be relied upon to imagine almost anything that was fantastic and exciting. Sure enough—soon a picturesque, medieval castle occupied the center of the room. On tiny little ledges about its many turrets, stood wild west cowboys and wilder Indians. Admiral Byrd would have been amazed at his new followers, perhaps, but he would have been more amazed to discover that he was not the only admiral in this expedition—there were to be five.

A big cardboard ship on wheels was parked at the entrance to the castle's drawbridge—the drawbridge serving as the gangplank, by which the people were to board the ship. At some distance, a small rug was mounded up to a peak, with a hole at the top. To some, it might have resembled an upside-down ice cream cone. But what it really was, Cynthia explained, was a volcano on a desert island, and a dangerous volcano, at that. When they came to the volcano part of the game, David could make the noise of its grumbling, Peter said. David hoped they would come to that part soon—he felt he would enjoy spitting out flame, and rumbling thunderously. And he hoped Michael's admiral would be walking up the side of the volcano, when the signal came for the eruption. It was something to look forward to.

"It would be fun to have David's little tin aeroplane flying over the volcano when it starts spouting," Peter suggested pleasantly. "Then the aeroplane could take a nose dive right down the crater."

David's eagerness slumped. That would put his aeroplane out of commission for the rest of the game. Then he happened to think that as long as he was the one to do the "erupting," he could wait until his aeroplane was past the volcano—and out of danger.

"Let's not see the volcano for a long time," Cynthia now suggested. "Let's explore other islands, and fight with the savage natives." (She was thinking of Dick Wentworth in the *Submarine Boys*.)

They were off! Judy's, Michael's and David's admirals were marched up the combination gangplank-drawbridge and onto the ship.

And in no time at all, the ship had discovered an unnamed island (curiously like a bed pillow) and was anchored before it.

As the men climbed its billowy sides, Peter glared about with bared teeth snarling and snapping.

"Who are you *now*?" Judy squealed weakly.

"I am the cannibal chief of this island. I am hiding behind the bushes, watching the men get off the boat," he snarled.

"My admiral wants to stay on the boat," Judy declared at once. "He doesn't like that island—he wants to write a letter to his mother."

"He was the first one off the boat," Cynthia said firmly. "Wasn't he, Peter? He can't write to his mother now. Let's start fighting those cannibals—"

"Forward—march!" Peter ordered.

The noise was terrific.

Judy shut her eyes tight and shouted in Michael's ear, "Who is winning?"

Boom-de-Boom. Boom! Boom!

"Oh glory! We've lost about ten men now. Those cannibals are using poison darts. It's awful!" Peter shrieked.

Judy could stand it no longer. Sliding from the bed, she flew for the canibal-infested island, shouting frantically, "Give me my admiral, give me my men. My men want to write to their mothers."

Her protest was met with a roar that fairly ripped the roof from the tower room. Peter and Cynthia rolled over and over on the floor in high glee. And up on the bed, David and Michael riotously joined in.

"My men want to write to their mothers!" Peter gasped, lying on his back, too exhausted now to let out even one more squeak of laughter.

But Judy didn't care how much they laughed at her. She had her admiral and his seven followers tight in her warm, moist fists. Climbing back on to the bed, she sat very still, blinking her eyes. Now, they could go on. Her men were safe.

Peter sat up and wiped tears from his eyes. The cannibals had all run away, he declared. Now their ship must continue its explorations. With a few more blasts—boom-boom—BOOM, it sailed away. The next island was strangely like the first, but Cynthia's men promptly made a discovery. As the explorers disembarked, she held out her hand and picked something from the air. Then she began to make the motions of eating.

"What's your admiral doing *now*?" David asked, puzzled.

"He is eating a banana. This island is covered with banana trees," she answered. That book Angus had lent her had all kinds of ideas for this game!

"It looks like an awful long one," Michael put in, "at least two feet."

"It is! This island is a paradise. There are all kinds of good things to eat here, aren't there, Peter?"

Peter nodded. "Oranges, figs, dates and tangerines—and *mangoes*!" He felt proud to remember mangoes. It showed he knew tropical fruits.

Judy blinked faster than ever. She felt very sorry for her admiral. He should have been enjoying this feast. Why did they have to think of it after he had left to write to his mother? She was just about to insist that her admiral continue on the trip, when she again clutched him fearfully. The boat had left this tropical island, with its heavenly fruits, and

now was pointing its nose toward that dangerous volcano!

“Now, Davy!” Peter was saying. “We must have the aeroplane. It has to scout over the top of the crater to see if everything is safe, before our men land.”

David hesitated. “Is my admiral supposed to be on the plane? And if it starts erupting just when I go over it, is the plane going to crash, and is my admiral going to fall into the crater?”

“What do you care? He might save Cynthia’s admiral, and mine and Michael’s,” Peter answered coolly. “Start the aeroplane flying over the crater, David.”

“It’s not going to start until I want it to,” David replied. “Not until I rumble.”

“I’ll do the rumbling,” Peter volunteered.

“Oh jinks!” David took his aeroplane, and with a sigh, moved it toward the menacing mound of carpet.

Peter began to “rumble.” It was contagious. Cynthia and Michael at once joined in. The effect was quite terrifying. The tower room shook with it. And Judy, on the bed, was too frightened *not* to look, and *not* to hear. With both horrified eyes on the volcano, she listened with both agonized ears. Suddenly, above the din, there came another roar. It was the wind outside, Cynthia thought delightedly.

But through the roar came words, and something made them all turn their eyes from the volcano to the door which led into the hall. There stood Delia, with her hands on her hips.

“Ye are not *dumb*, I see—but ’ave ye all gone stone-deaf?” she demanded. “I’ve yelled till me throat is worn out.” Then she cupped her hands to her mouth and roared again. “Lunch!”

Tumbling out of the tower room, they raced each other downstairs.

On the dining room table was the especially nice lunch Delia always had for them on rainy days. And Mrs. Abbott and Patty were waiting.

“I had two very important letters in the mail today,” Mrs. Abbott announced as soon as they were all in their seats. “One is very nice—and a happy surprise. The other one is not nice, and it is far from a happy surprise—”

“Mother,” Cynthia begged, “tell us first about the one that isn’t so nice—and isn’t a happy surprise.”

“Well, I must say, Cynthia, you seem eager for trouble,” her mother replied.

Delia shook her head with a wry smile. “Sure, and if it isn’t their own trouble, children git the more pleasure out of it than someone’s good luck.”

“Oh, what *is* the bad news?” Peter begged. “Please tell us, Aunt Sue—”

“I never heard anyone beg for bad news before,

but since you wish it, I'll tell you right now. The woman who owns this house, wants to sell it. She wants to get it off her hands, and she hasn't been able to sell, so far, because the property is involved in legal difficulties—"

"It's that Old-Lady-Witch!" Cynthia exclaimed. "What does she want to do with us?"

"She wants us to move. Your father and I had her promise that we could live here for a year at least, but it was not in writing. She told us that the property was so 'tied up,' because of some man's crookedness, that she couldn't sell, and she didn't think there was much chance of it. Now she wants us to leave this house in two months because she has had an offer for it."

There was a smothering silence.

"Oh, *Mother*," it was Cynthia speaking in a voice that broke, "will we have to go back and live in the city and in an apartment? Aren't we going to live in a tower house any more?"

"Cynthia, my darling—and all of you—we will *never* go back to an apartment. That I can promise you. And your father will see Old-Lady-Witch, as you call her, and try to arrange things so that we can stay here at least a year."

"I know about that crooked man—he stole a lot of money from poor widows—" Peter's eyes brightened with a sudden thought. Then he went on myste-

riously, “and I know what Old-Lady-Witch is after, and why she wants to come back to this house. It’s not because she’s going to sell this house. It’s because—you know, Cynthia.”

What this was all about, Mrs. Abbott hadn’t an idea, but she felt sorry for the children. They loved their happy tower house!

“You funny youngsters. Well, you know the bad news, now. But you have all forgotten to ask me what my good news was.”

“What is it? What is it?”

Mrs. Abbott smiled, then answered happily. “Grandma is coming for a visit in a few days—and tomorrow, Delia and I are going to put the tower room in beautiful order for her—”

“Oh, Aunt Sue! Aunt Sue!” Peter looked happier than the children had ever seen him.

All through the rest of the lunch, there was planning for Grandma’s visit. And when Mrs. Abbott noticed the glances Peter and Cynthia frequently exchanged, she thought they were planning a special surprise for the beloved guest.



Judy

XI

~ *Hidden Treasure* ~

THE minute lunch was over, Peter beckoned Cynthia out into the hall.

“Do you remember,” he whispered breathlessly once they were alone, “that time we decided we had something important to do on a rainy day? Today is the day.”

“What?” Cynthia asked even more breathlessly. Peter was plotting, she felt sure, and she loved “plots” in books, or out.

“Oh, don’t you *remember?*” Peter looked disappointed. How could she have forgotten? “Aunt Sue’s other letter ought to make you remember. Didn’t it give you an idea?”

"You mean about Old-Lady-Witch?" Cynthia spoke slowly, trying to remember. Oh dear, what was it? The other children would be there in another minute. "Tell me, tell me quick!" she begged, listening intently. Yes, David was coming.

Peter heard David, too. "Well," he said, "we'll have to have the others to help us, but I'll tell you now. Can't you guess why Old-Lady-Witch wants the house back quick? Can't you guess even *that!*"

"Oh yes, yes. I think I'm beginning to guess," Cynthia was making a desperate effort. David and Judy were very close now.

"I thought you would when you remembered that man who stole all the money. That's what she is after," Peter announced dramatically. "We can look for it this afternoon."

"You mean—! We can search in the attic for the money he hid?"

"Righto!" Peter shouted. He didn't care who heard, now that Cynthia had "guessed." "Come on, fellows, up to the attic, we have work to do," he called at the top of his voice.

"Are you going up to the haunted attic?"—Judy asked. "It's going to be awfully haunted this afternoon. It's so dark."

"Oh, scared-cat—don't come if you don't want to—" David scoffed. "O.K.—I'm coming!"

"So am I. I want to see the 'eyes' in the attic,"

and Michael's own eyes blinked in happy, if fearful, anticipation.

"I'm going, too!" Patty echoed.

"Oh no, ye don't, ye are going to take your nap. Ye've been crosser than two sticks this morning." And Delia picked Patty up in her arms.

With dragging feet, Judy followed the others up the stairs. Her choice was not one that filled her with any happiness. She certainly did not want to stay downstairs alone with her mother and Delia. But on the other hand, she did not like the idea of playing in a "haunted" attic on a rainy day.

Peter opened the attic door, and faced the others.

"We are going to search for the money that man hid here," he announced. "We are going to beat Old-Lady-Witch to it—"

"Maybe, if we find it, and give it to her, she won't want the house back," Cynthia suggested, hopefully. "Then we can stay here."

"Sure!" Peter agreed. "We'll give it all to her. Now we have to make plans. Cynthia, you go to that far side. Davy, you take this one nearest us. You're smaller, Michael, so you hunt in that corner where it's so low. And, Judy, you—"

"Oh, no! No!" Judy protested, taking a step back. "I'll just look here by the door."

Peter snorted in disgust. "Oh, all right. Stay out in the hall if you like. I'm going to stand up on the

trunks and search the rafters. I've got my flashlight. Ready now, let's go—"

With a whoop, all but Judy charged into the attic. It had never looked blacker. And the loud sound of the rain on the roof above added to the mysterious effect.

"The 'eyes' are awful wobbly today," Michael said, in a decidedly wobbly voice.

"They have tears in them," Cynthia suggested, her voice high with excitement.

"Maybe the 'eyes' are crying because we are going to take the money out of the attic," David suggested, as he crawled about, examining the floor boards.

"Maybe, the 'eyes' are really the eyes of the man who stole the money and he's haunting us." It was Peter, speaking from his perch on the trunk. Nor could he have asked for a more gratifying response.

"Peter Morgan! You stop talking like that this minute, or I'll go right downstairs and tell Mother," Judy cried. Then, putting her fingers in her ears, she began to sing lustily at the top of her voice.

"Look over here, Peter!" Michael cried suddenly. "There are lots of holes in the floor over in this corner—"

"Atta boy!" Peter shouted excitedly, jumping down off his trunk. "That's the place he would put them. Let's all crawl around on our hands and knees—"

Which they did for a long time—or so it seemed.

Peter flashed his light, pounded boards, dug his hands into crevices. At last, he crawled out into an open space and stood up.

"Now, where—" And he put his hand to his mouth in deep concentration and speculation. "I guess I'll go back to the rafters. I'll try this other trunk next." And he pulled himself up on it. Then looking down at the others, he explained, "What I'm really looking for is a hole in these rafters. If *I* were hiding money away, I'd make a hole of my own—" Peter was standing on the very edge of the trunk, both arms over his head, his hands feeling along a beam.

"Oh boy!" he shouted triumphantly, "here is a hole—I *think*." As he spoke, he leaned forward at a perilous angle, stretching up on tip toes, and at the same time searching for his flashlight, which he had put in one pocket.

The crash which followed shook the house. There on the attic floor, Peter was lying flat.

"What happened! What happened!" Cynthia screamed. "Did you get pushed?" And she tugged frantically at Peter.

Peter sat up. "No," he said, in a daze. "I just fell."

"Oh, Peter!" Cynthia was almost sobbing. "Your arm looks so funny."

Peter held out his arm, and the children eyed it in amazement. It did look funny!

"It's not broken off—it's still on you," David said with an air of great discernment. "But it is bent," he added.

"Yes, it does look *bent*, all right," Peter echoed.

Judy was tumbling down the attic stairs, shouting at the top of her lungs.

"Moth-er! Moth-er—Peter bent his arm. Peter *bent* his arm."

Mrs. Abbott and Delia came running.

"Peter's arm—*bent*!" Delia kept repeating. "I never heard tell of a *bent* arm!"

"Oh, dear!" Mrs. Abbott groaned. "What can have happened? And with Mother coming in a few days. Peter! Peter," she called, as she mounted the stairs to meet him. "Oh, my dear boy, what have you done?"

Peter held out his arm. It was indeed "bent" at an amazing and sickening angle.

Delia and Mrs. Abbott exchanged a quick look of distress and understanding.

"Sure, it's 'very bent' as you say, Davy," Delia said calmly. "So we'll be having a doctor take a look at it."

Early the next morning, Peter sat on the top step of the porch, the center of an admiring group. His five cousins were as close to him as they could get—and the two MacGregors, spic-and-span (they were

ready for their trip away to the country) were standing on the bottom step, staring at him with open-mouthed wonder. For Peter's arm was in a plaster cast. He had broken it, searching for hidden treasure in the attic! And since Angus and Allie had seen him, he had been X-rayed, and had been given ether while his arm was set.

"This isn't my only accident!" Peter was explaining modestly. "Once I had four stitches taken in my chin. You can see the scar if you look real close. That's when I was three." All seven in the audience promptly "looked real close."

"Tell Angus about the time you smashed your finger in your bicycle chain when you were fixing it," Cynthia ordered, after the scar had been thoroughly examined. "He had his nail pulled right off," she boasted.

Peter paused to swallow importantly, before he answered. "That was the winter we were in St. Louis. Grandmother was playing in a road company."

"And once he sprained his ankle—and he couldn't even stand up—or he would have yelled. A cop had to carry him—" David fairly stuttered with excitement.

Peter nodded. "That was in Denver."

"Tell about when your fish bowl broke and cut your foot—" Cynthia prompted, her eyes on Angus. She was delighted to see that Angus was completely

awed by this impressive list of accidents and cities.

"The fish bowl broke the time we were in New Orleans."

"Were the fishes killed?" Michael asked in alarm.

Peter shook his head with a frown. What did the fish matter? He was listing his *accidents*.

"Daddy said last night that Grandma won't be surprised when she sees Peter's arm, and that she'd have been surprised if she found Peter all in one piece. Daddy says he didn't think she could have stood it. This way is natural!" Cynthia repeated, with an unconscious imitation of her father's tone and manner.

Angus and Allie laughed. Then Angus said, regretfully, "I guess we've got to go now. But maybe we can come back. Then you can tell us about some more of your accidents, Peter."

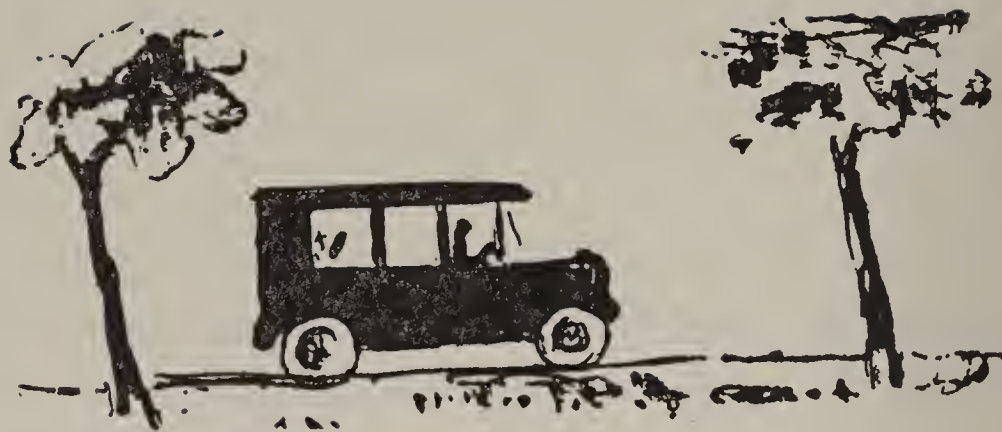
"So—so—so long if we d-d-don't get back," Allie stuttered.

"Goodbye! Goodbye! So long!"

For a few moments the summer air echoed with their shouts. Then the MacGregor boys disappeared from sight. Feeling forlorn, Peter sat looking after them. Beside him, Cynthia blinked at her tears.

And David, kicking at the grass, declared, "Oh, gee, it won't be half so much fun around here now."

Just then, at that very moment, they all saw it—the highest, biggest, strangest automobile one could imagine, coming slowly up the street and stopping by the curb in front of their house!



XII

~ *Old-Lady-Witch* ~

“I BET it’s thirty years old,” Peter said with an air of authority, as the car came to a stop. “I never saw an older one, not even in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.”

An old colored man, wearing a chauffeur’s cap, got out of the front seat and walked to the back door of the car. He moved slowly as though he were very stiff in the joints. The children watched him in silence as he opened the door and stood by ceremoniously, his cap in his hand. Then an old lady emerged from the car and held out one arm, which the old man took. With her other hand, she leaned heavily upon a cane. Slowly, very slowly, they came up the walk toward the porch.

The children stared in fascinated amazement. And as the strange pair drew nearer, perplexity was added to their amazement. When they looked at her cheeks,

criss-crossed like a withered apple, they felt sure she was very old. But when they looked at her hair, they weren't so sure. Her hair wasn't white, as old ladies' hair should be. It was black, dead black, like stove polish. And her eyes were even more black. Black eyes that were searching the house from porch to tower, then from side to side. So sharp, so penetrating were those eyes that they seemed to be seeing right through the walls. Could they see Delia in the kitchen, and Daddy and Mother in the dining room, David wondered.

"Oh!" Now she was looking at them. "I see the neighborhood has gathered. Probably every child for blocks around. You couldn't play in your own yards, I suppose?"

At the sound of her voice, the six children arose in vague alarm. Then Patty and Michael promptly fled around the corner of the house—to their own yard, the only one they knew. But Peter and Cynthia and David and Judy stood their ground bravely.

With a grim smile, the visitor watched Patty and Michael disappear, then turned to Peter. "I imagine at this early hour Mr. Abbott is still at home?" she asked, with never a glance at Peter's bandage.

"Oh, yes!" Peter answered. "He's inside, eating his breakfast." She might at least have noticed his broken arm!

"Ring the bell, Jefferson," the visitor ordered

sharply. "Then go back to the car and wait for me."

Silently the four watched, as Delia answered the summons of the bell and invited the strange lady inside, and the old colored man returned to the car.

Then Cynthia spoke. "It's the Old-Lady-Witch," she said in a low, frightened voice. "That's exactly who it is."

Judy shivered, then ran after Patty and Michael. Old-Lady-Witch—it was all she needed to know.

With one accord, Peter, Cynthia and David sat down on the swing. "Oh, dear," whispered Cynthia, with a glance at the open windows of the living room, "she's come to take the house back."

Peter and David did not reply. They were listening. Cynthia leaned her head against the back of the swing. Why did grown-ups always talk so fast when they were excited? She could hear the voices inside plainly, but not the words. All of them, that is. And they were being very polite.

"But don't you see, you promised—"

"But I told you I must sell when I could and now—"

Back and forth. And soon the voices were not nearly so polite.

"Uncle Tom's going to get mad in a minute," whispered Peter.

But Mrs. Abbott was speaking. "Don't you see," she said quite distinctly, "we love this house, all of us, especially the children."

“Well, I don’t love it,” answered Old-Lady-Witch, angrily. “I didn’t want it, in the first place. I only got it because a scalawag, a perfect scoundrel left it on my hands. And now that I have a chance to get rid of it, you cannot possibly blame me for taking advantage of my opportunity. I am sorry. I shall come again to make final arrangements.”

And without giving Mr. Abbott a chance to reply, she appeared on the porch again, and raised her cane as a signal to Jefferson to come and escort her back to the car. Peter and Cynthia and David looked toward the car. There on the running board sat Patty, a milk bottle filled with flowers beside her. And, as Jefferson got out of the car, she smiled up at him, in her most friendly fashion.

Jefferson came toward the house with a broad grin on his face. Apprehensively, the three on the porch glanced at Old-Lady-Witch. But they could not see her face for her back was toward them.

From her seat on the running board, Patty watched the old lady and the colored man approach her. And to the surprise of her brother and sister and cousin, they heard Old-Lady-Witch say, in a kind voice, “Are those flowers for me, baby?”

Patty bobbed her head up and down. “For you,” she repeated, holding up the milk bottle.

“Why, the little darling,” exclaimed Mrs. Carstairs. “Take them, Jefferson, milk bottle and all.

What's your name, sweetheart?" And she put her hand on Patty's head.

"Patty Ann Abbott!" said Patty loudly, quite bursting with pride and pleasure.

Mrs. Carstairs turned her head and looked back at the house. The child took after her mother, without doubt, she thought. But not after her father. The father was hot-headed. He hadn't seemed to understand her point at all.

"Now get off the step, darling. And thank you so much for the pretty flowers. Let me in the car, Jefferson, and be careful of that milk bottle."

Patty stood with one finger in her mouth, watching the car as it rode away. Then she was swept into Cynthia's arms. "Patty Abbott, you're wonderful. That ought to make her ashamed of herself and I hope it does!"

Patty's eyes blinked fast, and she squirmed out from Cynthia's grasp. She knew that word *ashamed*. "She gave 'em to me, Cynnie," she wailed. "Mrs. Adams gave 'em to me."

At that moment, their neighbor's head appeared above the hedge. "Don't scold your sister, Cynthia," she said. "I did give the flowers to her, just as she said. And is it true that you are going to move away?"

Cynthia walked over to the hedge. "I guess so. Mrs. Carstairs has just been telling my mother and

my father she wants us to. So I guess we'll have to move unless my father can think of something to do about it. Maybe he can, though. He's good at thinking of things to do."

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Adams told her then. "More sorry than I ever could have imagined I'd be, when I saw you all move in. It's been so cheerful, hearing you all around, and so interesting—waiting to see what would happen next. I declare, I've been sorry I engaged that room in the country. Elwood is plenty of country, when you come right down to it."

"Mrs. Adams says it's the country, after all," Cynthia shouted at Peter.

Rising carefully from his seat on the porch swing, Peter was preparing to join Cynthia at the hedge, when his uncle burst through the door and ran down the steps.

"I can make that train if anyone can," he was shouting. But half-way down the front walk, he turned. "Sue!" he called. "Sue! You go right ahead getting that tower room ready for your mother. I'd like to see anybody put her out of any place she wants to stay! Hear me, Sue? Hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you," called Mrs. Abbott from the upstairs window.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see him win out," commented Mrs. Adams, as she watched Mr. Abbott,

arms and legs flying, depart in the direction of the station. "He seems to be a man who gets what he goes after, no matter how."

"He certainly does," agreed Peter, coming up. "And our grandmother's even better. She's coming to visit, this week."

Two days later, another car drew up to the curb in front of the tower house. All the Abbotts recognized it at once. It was the big, old car which had brought them from the station, the day they moved to Elwood. And in it was another "old" lady. But this old lady did not have coal black, stove polish hair and even blacker eyes. This old lady's hair was a lovely, creamy white, and her eyes were very blue. Her cheeks were not criss-crossed with many fine lines, like a withered apple. They were soft and pink and white, like a baby's. And at sight of her, there was a wild shout of joy, as six children charged toward the old car.

"Grandma! Grandma's come!"

Mrs. Abbott and Delia hurried out to the porch. Mrs. Abbott's eyes glistened with tears of happiness, and her heart sang that during this visit her mother could have a room of her own. It was never so in the apartment. But now the children's happy tower room was hers, and hers alone for as long as she could stay. That is, if Mrs. Carstairs did not become

too insistent. . . . Quickly Mrs. Abbott thrust that thought from her mind.

Next door, Mrs. Adams stood at her window and watched the scene with intense curiosity. She had heard from the children that their grandmother was coming, and that she was an actress. Mrs. Adams had never seen an actress off the stage, but she had her own ideas about what one would look like.

With an exclamation of surprise, she pulled the curtain back still farther and stared. Why, she was a lovely little old lady, with soft white hair—a real grandmother! But as she continued to watch, and saw the little old lady catch one child (Peter first) in her arms, then another and another and another, and then walk nimbly up the steps and into the house, Mrs. Adams knew that “old lady” was something this particular grandmother would decidedly not wish to be called! She needed no cane nor arm to lean upon. Her step was as brisk as that of any of the children’s.

Mrs. Abbott came running down the steps and in another minute was in her mother’s arms. “Sue! Sue!” Grandma kept repeating. “My darling child!” Which was, all the children later agreed, a funny thing for Grandma to call their mother. And Mother seemed to like it!

Through the clamor, Delia announced that lunch was ready to put on the table. And without going to

her tower room first, Grandma linked her arm with Mother's, and led the way to the dining room.

"What will you do next, Peter," Grandma said ruefully, looking at Peter's plaster cast. "Another accident! But I am grateful you were here with your Aunt Sue when it happened. If you must keep on having accidents, boarding school is certainly not the place for them."

"Sure, and he was very brave about it, Mrs. Wilton," Delia put in, with an approving nod in Peter's direction. "We never heard a peep out of him—even if he was like a sheet of paper, that white. I thought he'd faint dead away—but he didn't."

"He has always turned white like that, Delia, with all his accidents, but he's always been a man about them," Mrs. Wilton spoke proudly, as she patted Peter's plaster cast. "That's real courage—to feel sick inside and conquer it."

"You haven't heard yet, Mother, how it happened," Mrs. Abbott added. "There is a real story back of it. He was searching for hidden 'loot' in our attic."

"Hidden loot!" Mrs. Wilton echoed. "Good gracious, hidden loot! That sounds like something from one of Peter's story books."

Peter made a determined attempt to tell the story in his own way—but his attempt went down to defeat. All of his cousins tried to give their versions, too, with most confusing results.

"Just a minute, children," Mrs. Wilton appealed, completely at sea. "What is all this? Who is Old-Lady-Witch? Surely, there is no chance—no danger of your having to move out of this house? In spite of Peter's arm, I never saw him looking healthier or happier. I couldn't bear the thought of having to put him in a boarding school again. He has never had any home life, and he needs it."

"I'm afraid it is a matter of moving," Mrs. Abbott replied. "And it does worry me. We couldn't possibly go back to an apartment. Yet it took such a dreadfully long time to find this house."

"We don't want another house, Grandma—we want *this* one," Cynthia burst out. "Wait till you see your tower room. You'll love it. Oh, we can't wait till you see it."

"Peter has been writing about my tower room—and all my life I've longed for one. It seems so safe and cozy—and away from everything. I know I'll love it."

Late that afternoon, Cynthia climbed the attic stairs, so absorbed in anticipation of a visit with her grandmother that she was quite unaware that Michael was at her heels. How lovely, she was thinking, to be alone with her in the tower room. In a way, Cynthia felt that the room was hers, she loved it so. But she was happy to have Grandma share it—Grandma, who, she knew, would love it as she did.

She stood in the doorway and looked about in aston-

ishment. Grandma was sitting in a big chair, right in the tower part of the room, reading. This was not amazing—but the walls were. In no time at all, they had been covered with photographs. Many of them were hung together with bright ribbons. On the bureau, at least a dozen, in frames, were standing, one before the other. Around the mirror, many small snapshots had been stuck into the frame.

“Why, Grandma—I never, never saw so many pictures. Who are they? Where did they all come from?”

Mrs. Wilton put her book aside, and with both hands beckoned with a welcoming smile. “Come in, children! Come in, both of you. I want to enjoy your innocent prattle.” (This last she said with a funny, little, teasing quirk to her mouth.)

Cynthia turned her head and to her surprise saw that Grandma really was talking to “children” and not to one “child.” There was Michael, looking so wistful she couldn’t possibly be cross with him.

“Those pictures are of all my children, my own boy, Peter, and his little Peter, my little girl, and all her babies—Cynthia, David, Judy and Michael and Patty. Every photograph, every snapshot you have all had taken since you were born, are right there. Wherever I go, they go along, and just as soon as I take off my hat in a hotel room, they come right out of the tray of my trunk and surround me. I have my dear ones with me every minute.”

Mrs. Wilton looked up over the rim of her glasses at Michael. He was a funny little tyke—and right now his round, sensitive, baby face looked so uncertain, so impressed, that she smiled encouragingly. Michael was afraid they would not want him there!

“Do you know who *my* little girl is, Michael?” she asked, holding out one hand.

Michael came toward her slowly, his eyes very large. “My Mother!” he nodded proudly. He had been hearing this all day—over and over.

“And do you know what I called my little girl when she was a child? Do you know her name? Besides Mother—of course, I never could call her that,” Mrs. Wilton went on.

Michael swallowed hard and looked at Cynthia for help. But Cynthia was going quickly from one picture to another. He hated to disappoint his grandmother. Yet he did not know, he could not guess what Grandma called his mother when she was a little girl.

“What does your Daddy call your mother, now?” Mrs. Wilton smiled.

Michael’s face was as solemn and as expressionless as a china doll. He had no idea—no idea in the world what his Daddy called his mother.

“Try to remember, Michael!” Mrs. Wilton coaxed. “He must call her something, indeed he must! Now what would you say, if your teacher asked you that, when you go to kindergarten in the fall?”

Michael's eyes brightened, and he nodded quickly. Of course he knew what his Daddy called his mother every morning.

"Termometer!" he answered, proudly.

"*What!*" Mrs. Wilton gasped. "Cynthia, what *does* Michael mean? He says your Father calls your mother—" she turned to Michael. "What did you say, Michael, dear? I can't quite make it out—not quite!" she added.

Michael's mouth quivered, and in a wavering and uncertain, little voice repeated, "Termometer. Daddy does so call Mother that every morning," he added with a forlorn defiance.

For a minute even Cynthia was confused. Then she laughed so hard she could scarcely answer. "He means *thermometer*. Daddy wants to know what all of his thermometers say *every* day. He says it's very healthy to dress according to the *thermometer!*"

"Well!" But Mrs. Wilton quickly stopped her own laughter, as she noted the hurt look on Michael's face. "Didn't you ever hear the name, Sue—or even Sussanna, dear?" she asked as she put one arm about Michael.

Michael smiled up at her happily. Of course he had. Daddy did say "Sue" once in a while—and Peter said "Aunt Sue" all the time!

"Oh, Grandma!" Cynthia cried out excitedly. "Is this a soldier in the Revolutionary War?"

Mrs. Wilton shook her head. "No, that is a photograph of my Uncle Henry Brooks. He was killed in the Civil War. I never saw him—he was killed before I was born—but my mother used to tell me his sad, brave story. He was only twenty-one and he was leading his men into battle, when it happened. He had just said, 'Follow me forward, boys'—"

"And he was shot down," Cynthia finished. "Just think, if he'd been in the Revolutionary War instead of that one maybe he would have been with George Washington. There's a mansion down the street where George Washington stayed once. Oh, Grandma—" and Cynthia dropped the photograph, her lips quivering, "do you think Old-Lady-Witch really will make us move? I love it so here."

For answer, Mrs. Wilton went to her bureau, opened the top drawer and took out a box of crackers and a bar of milk chocolate.

"This is not much to offer my guests, but I am sure you will agree that an afternoon call is never complete without some refreshments—however light. It adds something to the friendliness of the occasion. Don't you think so, Cynthia, and you, Michael?"

They both most certainly did! And it *was* an extra-special occasion, for only the two of them to be on hand, when refreshments were passed about! Nor would they be interrupted, for Peter and David and Judy had gone off to the store to get something Delia

needed for a "company" dinner. (Grandma's first dinner on any visit was always a "company" dinner.) And Patty was asleep.

When Michael saw his grandmother put the cracker box and the candy back in her bureau drawer, he decided that the "call" was at an end. Once the refreshments were eaten, any party was over for Michael! He darted for the door.

"You wouldn't eat and run, would you, Michael?" Mrs. Wilton smiled.

Michael nodded. He would eat and run! But, of course, he must make his party speech. He stood in the doorway, and very politely recited what his mother had taught him.

"I had a very nice time, Grandma, thank you very much," he said. Then, with a shy smile, he turned and fled. They could hear him tramping down the stairs.

"Come, Cynthia!" Mrs. Wilton pulled a chair over beside her own and patted it invitingly. "Come and sit beside me, and have a cozy gossip with your grandmother."

Cynthia accepted the invitation with a radiant smile. Her grandmother was talking to her as though she were really grown up!

"Tell me, Cynthia—what's all this about hidden 'loot' in the attic? Surely, it's just a game? You can't really expect anyone to come after it, as you were all

trying to tell me at luncheon.” Mrs. Wilton’s face was puckered up with mischief. There was something of Judy’s expression, when Judy wasn’t sure whether to be worried or not. For certainly Old-Lady-Witch was not a reassuring thought.

“But before we start, darling, I wish to say one thing,” Mrs. Wilton told her granddaughter then. “You are not to get upset about this moving business. You’re quite right, this is the nicest house that could possibly be. Plenty big enough and with a fine yard. And as for the tower—” Grandma interrupted herself to look around her room with deepest satisfaction. “After all, Mrs. Carstairs told your mother and father she would come again to settle everything, didn’t she? So you see that means it isn’t all settled yet.”

Cynthia nodded slowly, then asked, “But what could be settled besides Old-Lady-Witch’s saying she wants us to move? She owns the house.”

Mrs. Wilton pursed her lips. “I haven’t seen her yet,” she said, which somehow seemed to close the matter. “Now tell me about that loot!”

“Well, you see,” began Cynthia slowly.

Without comment, Mrs. Wilton listened to it all—about the old scoundrel, the widows and orphans, Old-Lady-Witch and her colored mammy, and the money that Peter felt sure was hidden in the attic.

“Of course,” Cynthia admitted honestly, as the story

drew to its close, "we don't know for sure that it's here. But money did get stolen. Mrs. Adams said so. And Mrs. Carstairs told Daddy and Mother that an old scoundrel left this place on her hands. And it is exciting and nice and shivery to think about his hiding loot right here, and our maybe finding it."

Mrs. Wilton nodded understandingly. "It certainly is. But what else have you been doing, honey, besides hunting for the loot and getting Peter's arm broken?"

For a long time, they talked on and on—about the tree houses in the grove, about the rabbits, about the underground hut, about Angus and Allie—even about the potatoes and the goat and Mr. Seton.

Then, with an exclamation that startled her grandmother, Cynthia cried, "Oh, Grandmother, the Czarina dress! Is it here?"

Mrs. Wilton looked down at her granddaughter with puzzled eyes. "The Czarina dress?" she repeated.

"The one you wore when you played the part of the Czarina," Cynthia explained.

"Oh—you mean my Catherine the Great dress. That was one of my best parts. How well I remember the night—" But at sight of the longing on Cynthia's face, Mrs. Wilton broke off her recollections to ask, "But what do you mean, is it here?"

"In your trunk, Grandma. The one Peter was standing on when he fell off and broke his arm.

Mother said the Czarina dress might be in there. And I've been wanting to see it for ages and ages."

"Ages and ages, is it? Oh, I remember now. You mean that old theatrical trunk I shipped to your mother several years ago. To be sure, it was filled with costumes. Certainly, the Czarina dress is there! And my Juliet costume, and Little Buttercup's rig, too."

Mrs. Wilton sighed and leaned back in her chair. "Ah, me, the night that, as Little Buttercup, I—"

But for once Cynthia was not interested in a story. "Grandma," she said pleadingly, "do you suppose we could go look in the trunk now?"

For answer, Mrs. Wilton leaned over and took her huge handbag from the bureau. "Certainly, my child. This very minute. Lead on, Macduff."

"So this is the attic!" she said, when Cynthia ushered her through the door. "I must say it does look like just the place to hide loot. It is quite the most romantic and mysterious attic I have ever seen. It certainly is. I can well understand why Peter felt that someone would pick one of those dark corners for a hiding place for his booty."

"There's your trunk, Grandma!" And Cynthia pointed, her voice quivering with excitement. "It's got labels all over it, and your name is on it, too. See, Beulah Wilton."

"It's the first trunk I ever had, Cynthia, the one that started me on my career—but where on earth is that key ring? I certainly put it in here."

Cynthia held her breath as her grandmother groped about in her big, bulging handbag. At last Mrs. Wilton triumphantly pulled out a key ring dangling with keys of every shape and size. "Now keep your fingers crossed, Cynthia, my child. The right key should be here—I never throw one away. But you never can tell. There—I *think* this is it." And she went toward the trunk with a key separated from the rest.

Conscientiously, Cynthia crossed her fingers.

"No, that isn't it. Well, maybe this one. No—"

Oh, what if the right key weren't there, at all?

"This one, perhaps—."

It was the right one. It fitted! Slowly, on creaking hinges, the trunk's lid was lifted. For years the trunk had been in damp places, and the hinges were heavy with rust. Cynthia leaned forward eagerly, her small, straight nose quivering like a rabbit's.

"My first trunk! Over thirty years old, it is. And things in it I haven't thought of for half that time, or more." Mrs. Wilton's fingers played over the small boxes stuffed into the compartments of the tray. "And here, my dear," she said, as she lifted up a larger box that looked as though it had held candy in days gone by, "is the loot!"

She removed the lid, then smiled broadly. Without

a word, Cynthia peered into the box. Diamonds! Strings and strings of diamonds! Huge ones, such as a king would be happy to possess! Cynthia touched them, fearfully and gingerly, with the tips of her fingers.

“Paste reproductions of the crown jewels of the Romanoffs, my dear,” her grandmother went on. “Take that longest chain and put it around your neck. There should be a shorter chain, too, that just circles the throat, set with rubies, pearls and emeralds. Here it is—try them both on, if you like. And slip some of the bracelets on your arm—.” Mrs. Wilton was enjoying this moment hugely.

Without a word, Cynthia slipped the long chain over her head. Then she took up the shorter chain of intricate design, and clasped it, with her grandmother’s assistance, around her throat.

“There now, Cynthia,” Mrs. Wilton said, standing back in admiration. “You are wearing the diamonds, pearls and emeralds, not to mention rubies, of the most powerful, and greatest of Queens, Catherine the Great. Think of what these jewels have meant in the world’s history, and how they have changed it! Such chains as you are wearing brought the great dynasty of the Russians to a tragic end.”

Her voice, though low, was vibrant with feeling. And Cynthia responded to it, as many an audience in the theatre had responded, when Beulah Wilton, on

the stage, was Catherine the Great. Now Mrs. Wilton groped in the trunk for another box from which with reverent hands she took—

“A crown,” breathed Cynthia.

Her grandmother, there in their own attic, was holding a crown of jewels in her hands. The crown of the Romanoffs! With a reverent gesture, Beulah Wilton placed the crown on her granddaughter’s head.

“Oh, Grandma,” Cynthia gasped. “Oh, Grandma!”

After a moment of respectful silence, Mrs. Wilton turned and lifted the tray from the trunk and placed it on the floor. “What care we for time, fair maid?” she said. “We are wandering, wandering back through the ages.”

The fascinating, musty smell was heavy in the air. Kneeling beside the trunk, Mrs. Wilton turned over gown after gown of satin or velvet.

“Ah! Here it is—a part of Buttercup’s costume. I’m dear little Buttercup, sweet little Buttercup . . . but that isn’t what you want. Here is the court train for you. I won’t bother to take out Catherine’s dress now. Anyway, you would swim in it.”

“I’d rather swim in Catherine the Great’s dress than anything I know of,” said Cynthia so earnestly that her grandmother laughed.

“Then you shall,” declared Mrs. Wilton, as Cynthia tingled with delicious excitement. “Tomorrow. But not now, before dinner. Your father will be

here, any minute. We'll just take out the court train and you can slip your arms through the holes, to get the effect."

The huge court train of green velvet was edged with ermine. And as Mrs. Wilton led the way back to the bedroom, Cynthia followed, in ecstasy.

"Now! Slip your arms through these arm holes at the top of the train—so! No, don't look in the mirror just yet." And Mrs. Wilton stooped to adjust the long folds. "Now let me put your crown a bit more straight. There!" And she turned Cynthia around, to look in the mirror.

Cynthia gasped. "Oh, Grandma! Isn't it beautiful! Isn't it gorgeous! I love it! I love it! And isn't one of these diamonds real, maybe?"

Mrs. Wilton shook her head. "I'm afraid not, dear. As a matter of fact, I have my doubts as to whether any diamond ever was as large as those are. But anyway, they are loot and they were in the attic. So you see Peter was right, all along, only he didn't look in the right place. Now then, let's make what you call an entrance."

Down the stairs swept Cynthia, followed by the court train and Mrs. Wilton. And through the door swept Mr. Abbott, instantly entering into the spirit of the occasion and not satisfied with his obeisance until he had bowed low three times, kissed the hand of Cynthia—Catherine—and that of their distinguished visitor.

"Our humble home is glorified, Madame," he declared. "You are come."

Cynthia lay awake for a long time, that night, dreaming of Catherine the Great. Tomorrow, Grandmother had promised, she could wear the Czarina dress itself. She didn't care how much she swam in it. She would sweep from the room, holding her head high—my, goodness, what was that?

The strangest, most mysterious noise was right above her head. Something heavy was being dragged over the floor above her. Bolt upright in bed, Cynthia listened. Now something else that was big and heavy was being dragged along.

A terrifying thought rushed into her mind. Had someone actually come back for the loot in the attic? Someone who had been looking in at the sitting room window, maybe, when she had the crown on, and the necklaces and the bracelets—and had thought they were real. Perhaps the person who had looked in had climbed up to Grandma's window and gotten in and . . .

"Good night, Mother darling!" It was Mother, calling good night to Grandma, up the attic stairs. "Everything all right?"

"All right?" That was Grandma's voice, cheerful and happy, although muffled and far away. "I should

say so. Cozy as a bug-in-a-rug. Everything is perfect. Good night.”

Up above Cynthia’s head, the noise had stopped. Down the hall, Mother and Daddy were getting ready for bed. Very still in the darkness of her room, Cynthia tried to untangle the mystery. She had heard a queer noise. More than one, as a matter of fact. But Grandma seemed to be all right. What could it be, what could . . . Cynthia was asleep.



XIII

~ *Saucers of Milk* ~

NEXT morning, Cynthia awoke with a feeling of uneasiness. What had happened? Something—just before she fell asleep last night. . . . Oh, yes. Something heavy had been dragged across the floor upstairs, right above her head. As she lay looking thoughtfully up at the ceiling, she heard Delia's voice, mingled with the chattering and laughing of her

younger brothers and sisters. The house was astir. Well, whatever it was, everything must be all right, for Delia slept up on the third floor, as well as Grandma, and she was laughing.

But what was that? It was the same strange, ominous sound of something being dragged across the floor above her head.

"Peter!" called Cynthia, leaping out of bed and toward the door. "Peter, come here quick!"

Peter came flying. There was no denying the frantic plea in Cynthia's voice. "What is it, Cynthy? What is it?"

Cynthia pointed a little wildly at the ceiling. "Listen!"

Again the strange noise rumbled from above. "Do you hear that? I think that thief is up in the attic again, after the loot. I bet he heard that Old-Lady-Witch is going to sell the house and he thinks that this is his last chance."

Peter listened, but although part of his mind quickly caught Cynthia's fever of excitement and alarm, the other part continued to think calmly. "But that isn't the attic up there, is it, Cynthia?" the thinking part told him to ask. "It's the tower room, isn't it?" And he looked up, frowning in concentration. "Yes, it is the tower room," he went on, slowly. "It's got to be. It isn't the attic, at all."

"But couldn't he have hidden the money in the

tower room, maybe? Lots of tower rooms are haunted. I've read about them," Cynthia insisted.

"But Grandma's there," Peter reminded her. "And if you think Grandma would stay in a room with a man searching for money, you don't know Grandma. She's awfully scary about her room and—"

A new and terrible thought shot into Cynthia's head then. "Peter!" she gasped. "Maybe Grandma's not there now. Maybe—"

"Holy smokes!" exclaimed Peter. "I haven't heard her talking this morning, and there's been a lot of noise around."

"Let's tell Daddy," cried Cynthia, running out the door. "Daddy!"

Peter loitered behind, still looking up at the ceiling. The noise overhead had ceased. All was quiet up there.

"Daddy!" Cynthia was shouting in the hall.

"Hush, dear!" warned Mrs. Abbott, coming out from her bedroom. She stood at the foot of the attic stairs and looked up anxiously.

Peter, at the door of Cynthia's room, saw Mrs. Abbott's expression. So Aunt Sue was worried, too!

"Is Grandma—" he began.

"Hush!" said Mrs. Abbott again. "I want Grandma to sleep as long as she wishes."

"But she doesn't wish. Not a wink more. She wishes to come down and have breakfast with her

family. It's a rare treat," called a bright voice from above.

Peter and Cynthia looked at each other in profound relief. So Grandma was all right, then! But in a moment, Cynthia stared at her cousin with renewed perplexity. She certainly *had* heard that dragging noise last night. And again this morning. What was it?

Suddenly Peter's face broke into a broad grin. "I've got the answer, Cynthia. Come on, I'll tell you. I know what it was."

"You'll never guess, never," he informed her, when they had closed the door of her room to make sure of privacy.

"I don't intend to guess," Cynthia told him impatiently.

"All right. Get ready for a surprise. You're going to drop dead."

"I'll drop dead if you don't tell me this minute, Peter Morgan," retorted Cynthia, more than a little angry at Peter's superior air. "I suppose you're going to tell me Grandma was the one who was dragging those trunks around?"

"I thought you said you wouldn't guess."

"I'm not."

"But you did guess."

"I didn't."

"Yes you did, too. You said probably Grandma

was pushing the trunks around. Well, it wasn't trunks. It was furniture! But you came so close, you were really right, anyway."

Cynthia stared at her cousin blankly.

"Honestly. She always does it in hotels at night. First she pulls the bed in front of the door—to barricade it, she says. Then next comes the bureau. Or maybe a table, it depends."

"Depends on what?" asked Cynthia completely bewildered.

"On how big the room is. If it's very small, just the bed and the bureau and chair will do—or you'd push the wall out."

Cynthia sat down suddenly on the edge of her bed and continued to stare at Peter.

"You see—" went on Peter with relish, making ready for the whole story, "Grandma says it makes her feel cozy and safe, like a bug in a rug. She doesn't trust keys. Once a long time ago when she was traveling around, someone got into her room with a pass key and stole a lot of rings and pins, which were practically family heirlooms. And all the while he was doing it, Grandma was asleep and never knew it." Peter paused. Then, satisfied that Cynthia was genuinely impressed, he continued. "So that is why she moves the furniture in front of the door. Lots of people ask her what she'd do if there was a fire, and she always says she'd rather jump out the window into a

fireman's net than have someone come in at the door."

"But how does she know a fireman's net would be there?" Cynthia asked, sensibly.

"It would be," replied Peter, "for Grandma. She's that kind of person."

Cynthia sat still, thinking hard.

"Can Grandma really make things happen exactly the way she wants them to?" she asked.

"She certainly can," Peter told her.

"Oh, Peter, do you suppose she could make Old-Lady-Witch—"

Cynthia got no further, for just then her father called from the hall, "Everybody out! Everybody out for breakfast!"

Without further discussion, Peter rushed to his room to dress, and Cynthia hurried, instead of dawdling as she usually did while putting on her clothes. Neither wanted to miss the first breakfast with Grandma!

It was a riotous, happy breakfast.

Looking around the table proudly, Mr. Abbott beamed upon his family. "What do you think of this sight? Grandma, mother, father—and six children. Not to mention our good Delia right at our elbows! Quite a sight. And the sun coming through the rose-vine around the windows—"

"Honeysuckle!" Mrs. Abbott corrected with a laugh.

"Oh, it is beautiful!" Mrs. Wilton turned her head and gave Peter a tender look. "I can't begin to say how happy I am to have Peter a part of this picture, even with his arm in a sling."

"There is no place like the country for children—*no place*," Mr. Abbott declared. "That's what I've always said—"

"Always?" Mrs. Abbott teased, giving her mother a funny, little smile.

"Well—" Mr. Abbott grinned, ducking his head. "Well, ever since we've been here. Of course, in the beginning, I didn't know what the 'country' was like. So I couldn't have any sound ideas on it."

"This morning when I woke up, the sun was streaming through the leaves on that beautiful, old oak tree and making lovely patterns all over everything in my tower room. And I felt as though I were nearer to heaven than I had ever expected to be on this earth." And Mrs. Wilton, too, looked down and around the table with a proud, happy smile.

Mr. Abbott smiled back at her, as though he were personally responsible for the sun, the beautiful, old oak tree and the tower room.

"That is just the way I felt the first morning after we moved out here," he replied. "The peace and quiet—the fragrance of the country wafting through the windows. Beautiful! Peace—there's nothing like it," her son-in-law declared.

Cynthia stared at her father. Then her mouth parted and her eyes opened wide. That first morning! The cats and the shoes and the window and the lost funnies! Quiet! Glancing at her mother, she caught the sly little wink Mrs. Abbott gave her.

"Yes, we can truthfully say the peace and quiet of that first morning was something that we never expected on this earth. Have another piece of toast, Tommy dear?" Mrs. Abbott asked sweetly.

Mr. Abbott looked over his glasses suspiciously.

"Oh, by the way—don't you expect to hear from Mrs. Carstairs today?" his wife asked quickly.

"That's Old-Lady-Witch," Peter explained to his Grandmother. "She wants us to move, you know."

"No, not today," Mr. Abbott told his wife. "I got a message at the office yesterday that she won't be back until next Monday—called out of town or something."

"She wants us to get out of our tower house! Daddy, don't let her, don't let her!" Cynthia begged. "Oh, Grandma, wouldn't it be awful? We love it so here!"

"Don't put that thought on it," Mrs. Wilton said quickly. "Don't put the thought out that you are going to have to move. Keep thinking that it's going to be all right and beautiful. I do believe it helps!"

"Didn't you ever think something was going to go as smooth as silk, and have it go as smooth as barbed wire?" Mr. Abbott asked, with a twinkle in his eyes.

“Well, I’d still have an advantage over your way. You would be having headaches and worries all the way, right through to the end, while I’d only have it at the end.”

“Very well, dear Mother, this minute I am thinking the loveliest thoughts.” And Mr. Abbott shut his eyes, as though in a dream. “I am thinking that our delightful, kindly, big-hearted landlady is going to telephone me as soon as she gets back next week and she is going to say, ‘My dear Mr. Abbott, I want to apologize to you and that lovely wife of yours for causing you a moment’s uneasiness. I wouldn’t for the world force you and your children to leave my tower house.’ ”

The children laughed loudly at the sally. Daddy was so funny! They had all seen Old-Lady-Witch, and they knew only too well how impossible this beautiful “thought” was.

Mrs. Wilton joined in the laughter. Then she said, “Just you wait! All this beautiful morning I shall go right on thinking that you are going to live in this house as long as you wish. But I’m going to think more than that, too. I’m going to work out a plan of action. That’s what you need—a plan of action!”

Rising from his seat at the head of the table, Mr. Abbott bowed low. “Madame Grandmother, I yield to the family dynamo. Little does Mrs. Carstairs real-

ize, as she sips her morning coffee, that she has less than a chance in a thousand of getting her house back, now that you are in action."

"Tom dear," protested Mrs. Abbott, "don't raise the children's hopes. Even Mother may not be able to—"

Mr. Abbott held up his hand. "My dear, I was merely stating a fact. Once your mother decides something is to be done, her goal is practically achieved. I state it. I reaffirm it! And—goodbye!"

Mrs. Wilton decided to spend the morning out in the back yard with its two cherry trees, one apple tree, and its very mangy, beetle-eaten rose vines.

"Come, children," she called. "I want you all near me. And the more noise you make, the better I'll be able to think."

Delia carried out a wicker chair into the yard, and began to pile it with pillows.

"Now! Now! Delia don't pamper me, don't spoil me—I am not in the least used to it. I like sitting right up straight. On the stage I may play at being an old lady—that's my business. But I can assure you, I am not one. I am working just as hard as I did thirty years ago—and I like it!"

"Sure and if it isn't a fact," Delia agreed with hearty approval. "But even the youngest and best must have a bit of rest now and then. But don't worry that ye'll be getting too much of a rest. I'm after warning ye, ma'am, if ye have all them young-

sters around all morning, it's little enough ye'll have." Delia grinned and shook her head.

For answer, Mrs. Wilton smiled happily down at Peter, Cynthia, and David, squatting on the grass beside her. In a riotous hubbub they were trying to read her the postals which had just come from Angus MacGregor. Even if they had been presented quietly, the cards would have needed a deal of explaining.

Mrs. Wilton put on her glasses and held out her hand. "One at a time, darlings," she said. "First you, Peter. Show me your card."

Peter's postal was addressed to *Mr. Peter Robinson Crusoe Morgan*. The message read, *Dear Watermelon Pete. Have you broken your other arm yet? Your man Friday.*

Mrs. Wilton looked up over her glasses at Peter with a funny little three-cornered smile.

"I'll wait for the explanation, Grandson. Show me yours, Cynthia."

Miss Cynthia Agnes Abbott, Grandma read, and then shook her head. "Curious and curiouiser—why Agnes?" Then she looked at the message. *Dear Cynthia, how's Dick Wentworth? Hope he finds treasure for you. With love from your friend Angus-Agnes.*

Cynthia's face was a lively pink, as she noted the twinkle of amusement in her grandmother's eyes at this signature. Wasn't Angus—*silly!*

David's card came next. It had been sent to *Mr. David Tuesday Abbott*, and his message read, *Dear Davy-the-goat-boy! How do you like watermelons?* The signature was just *Friday*.

Mrs. Wilton put these remarkable cards in her lap and laid her hands quietly upon them. Her eyes were bright with anticipation.

"I am going to have a perfectly lovely morning, I can see. All right, let's begin. Tell me what all these strange messages mean with their hints at intrigue."

Before the three in the audience could reply, Patty, Judy and Michael came tumbling over the lawn. But after some warnings from the older children of the punishment that would follow interruptions, and smiling requests from their grandmother, they subsided in silence. Grandma wanted each postal card explained in detail and with all its trimmings, it seemed—a desire Peter and Cynthia and David happily fulfilled. But the strain of being "hushed" proved too much for Patty. She soon wandered off, followed a little later by Michael. Judy stayed to prove that she had every right to be there, even if Angus and Allie hadn't sent her a post card. Cynthia and Peter and David weren't going to leave her out!

And they didn't. They explained all about the post cards, then invited Grandma to go with them to see the hut before she went away. Angus and Allie

had left it in their charge, Peter explained. And even if Grandma didn't want to crawl inside, she could see it, anyway.

"All my life I have never had a happier morning," Mrs. Wilton told her daughter across the lunch table.

Then Cynthia remembered. "But, Grandma," she asked, "the plan of action!"

Serenely Mrs. Wilton smiled at her oldest granddaughter. "Almost ready," she reassured her grandchildren with a smile that included them all. "Give me a beauty-nap, as soon as lunch is over, and I'll have my idea. Then with the rest of the week to perfect it, I should like to see Old-Lady-Witch get the upper hand. The idea of asking you to move from this perfect place!"

"Didn't I tell you she'd fix it," Peter whispered to Cynthia, after Grandma had gone up the attic stairs and closed her door for the nap. "Grandma can do everything."

"Are you sure, Peter? What if even Grandma can't—"

"I guess I know what she can do, all right," returned Peter, then, forgetting the beauty nap, he shouted at the top of his lungs, "Hurry up, you fellows. We've got to look over that hut this afternoon. And I'm going to buy a postal card to write to Angus and tell him everything's all right."

"Maybe we'll help milk the goat, too," he added to Cynthia. "Want to come?"

Cynthia shook her head. "I'd rather read." Besides, although she did not mention it, there was the Czarina dress to try on.

After the boys had disappeared, she went out into the back yard, curled up in the chair which Mrs. Wilton had occupied that morning, and prepared to re-read *Little Women*. It was queer about books, she thought. Some you liked once—like Angus' Dick Wentworth story. But you would never think of going back over them again. You knew everything in them just by reading them once.

But *Little Women* was different. Meg and Jo and Beth and Amy were like your own friends. Why, they *were* your friends. And no matter how many times you were with them, you wanted to be where they were, some more. Opening the book, Cynthia flicked the pages rapidly. This was another nice thing about favorite books—you didn't need to begin at the beginning again, unless you especially wanted to. You could go straight to the place you most wanted at the moment. . . . Today, for some reason, the part about Jo's cutting off her hair appealed to Cynthia. And, as she read, thoughts of Grandma's plan of action were woven into her reading of the well-loved pages. . . . Was Grandma awake from her nap by now? And had she thought of something to do about Old-Lady-Witch? Grandma and Jo were a lot alike, when you come right down to it. . . .

She had just begun to twist her hair around her

finger when she heard a faint little, "Miaouw." What was that? In another instant, Jo tumbled to the ground along with Meg and Beth and Amy and the rest.

"It's mine!" Cynthia cried in ecstasy. "It's going to be all mine! Come, kitty. Come here, you sweet little thing."

Its tail straight up in the air, the small grey kitten walked into Cynthia's arms.

"My little grey kitten! Exactly the kind I wanted most." And she held the soft little bundle of fur up against her face. "You darling!"

Then she ran toward the back door. "Mother! Delia! Let me in, Delia. See what I have."

Delia came to the door and looked through the screen.

"Glory be to goodness, look at that now," she smiled. "Where on earth did ye get him, Cynthia?"

"Isn't it amazing?" gurgled Cynthia. "He walked right around the corner of the house and found me. He knew just where I was."

"Sure, and I'll never doubt it. Strange things like that do be happening in this world. Was ye by any chance putting yer thoughts on him now, like yer grandmother was after telling about at breakfast?"

"Oh, yes! I've been thinking about him for ages." And Cynthia rubbed her warm, flushed cheek against the kitten's fur. "Isn't he sweet—so soft. I love him!"

Mrs. Abbott came up behind Delia and looked down at the small, soft bundle in Cynthia's arms.

"What a pretty, little kitten! Whose is he?" she asked smiling.

"Whose is he!" Cynthia gasped in surprise. "Why, he's mine, of course. Daddy promised him to me, 'way back in the apartment. Don't you remember, Mother?"

Mrs. Abbott nodded. Then she spoke slowly, "But so far as I know your Daddy never saw that kitten—or I am sure he would have told me." (Could she be too sure this would be so, she asked herself, recalling the rabbits.) "No, Cynthia, that can't be your kitten. It must belong to someone in the neighborhood. You must find its owner."

Tears came to Cynthia's eyes, and she looked up at her mother imploringly. "Oh, Mother! He came right up to me. And he's purring—he wants to stay. Oh, Mother!"

"Sure, and that's right, Mrs. Abbott. It was sort of a wonderment how he came, a miracle, ye might say. I've a feeling in me bones he was meant for Cynthia." Delia was touched at the heartbreak in the small face above the kitten.

"It is a sweet little thing," Mrs. Abbott admitted. "And I would be only too glad to let you keep it, Cynthia darling. But, don't you see, more than likely some other little girl or boy loves him for a pet, and

would feel terribly to have him lost? That's what he is, I am afraid, a little, lost kitty. He's not just a neglected little alley cat—his fur is much too soft."

"Can't I even give him a saucer of milk?"

"Oh, yes. But then you must let him go back to his home. Cats find their way back where they belong. Don't feed him more than once, though, or he will settle down here."

Cynthia bent her head over the kitten so her mother would not see the sudden joy in her face. So—he would stay if she fed him again. That was a happy thought!

After she had given the kitten his saucer of milk, and had been thrilled to her toes at the way he lapped it up, she went out of the front door with him in her arms. To all appearances, she was taking him to look for his rightful owner. But actually she was going straight to the Van Winkle place. She wanted to show him to Peter and her brothers.

The boys were enraptured. A kitten had many more possibilities for fun than stupid rabbits and turtles. And not for a second did they consider the fact that they might not keep him—until Cynthia told them the whole story.

"Mother says if we feed him, he will stay with us—he will keep coming back," Cynthia eyed Peter intently. Would he get her idea? Peter did, instantly.

"Let's drop him just a little way from our house,

but so he can see it," he suggested. "And if we put a saucer of milk under the back porch—why—why—" he broke off, guiltily. Then he asked, "We can't let a sweet little kitten like this starve, can we?"

"And don't let's tell anyone the milk is there, except the kitten. He can keep coming for it all the time—until he always stays at our house. Then Mother will know he loves us best." Cynthia's eyes were shining with hope.

For the next three or four days, some one of the family was always saying in great surprise, "Why, here's that little, grey kitten again!"

"Did you try to find his owner?" Mrs. Abbott asked over and over. And over and over came the answer, "Nobody's come to ask for him at all. Oh, Mother, let's have him! Please! Please!"

But Mother was firm. "I can't promise until I know that he is not some child's lost pet."

All the children loved the little kitten better than any pet they had ever had. Even Mr. Abbott frequently declared, "If his owner doesn't care enough about him to look for him, he deserves to lose him. It's the best pet we've had so far. In fact, there can be none better until I get that puppy I've promised myself—and all of you."

Peter even went so far as to cancel his order for the alligator. He couldn't have an alligator biting off the soft, furry toes of this sweet, little pussy. Any-

way, they had been much too long in sending it. With the refund generously advanced by Mrs. Wilton, he bought a catnip mouse and ball for their pet.

"It does seem strange," Mrs. Abbott said to Delia, in the kitchen. "That kitten is always here! I can't understand it."

"Sure, the whole thing's strange and weird. Now if I was a child back in Ireland, I'd be thinking the fairies brought him," Delia replied, with never a word about the saucers of milk that kept going out the back door in a pair of hands! "What's more, it's a blessing in disguise, I'm telling ye, Mrs. Abbott. It's took their minds off that old witch that's coming next Monday."

Mrs. Abbott sighed. "I wish I could feel as confident as Mother about the outcome. She says it's all as good as fixed. But what she is going to do, she won't say. Oh, dear."

"Whatever it is, it'll turn the trick, ma'am. Mrs. Wilton, she knows how."



Little Patty

XIV

~ *Grandma's Secret* ~

ALL Sunday afternoon and Monday morning the children played with their new pet and laughed themselves weak at his antics. Funniest of all, they agreed, was what he suddenly began to do just after Monday lunch, on the back porch. He hunched his back, walked sideways on tiptoes, then charged on the catnip mouse.

"I'm going to get Grandma," Cynthia said, when the kitten repeated the trick, obligingly.

Mrs. Wilton, she knew, had settled down on the front porch to read. But as Cynthia turned the corner of the house, she heard voices. Cocking her head, she recognized her grandmother's voice. But whose

was the other one? It had a certain familiar ring to it. Then her eyes fell on a big, clumsy-looking automobile at the curb. At its wheel was an old colored man in a chauffeur's hat. Goodness! It was Old-Lady-Witch again. They had forgotten all about her!

Cynthia walked slowly across the grass and could not believe what she saw. Old-Lady-Witch was sitting on the porch swing with Patty almost in her lap, she was that close! And Grandma and Old-Lady-Witch were not only talking, they were laughing—like old, old friends. Cynthia stood still, her heart pounding for all it was worth. The two women had not heard her light footfall on the grass, and they were much too interested in each other to turn their heads. Cynthia took a few more steps toward the porch stairs, then stood still again. Now they could not see her, even if they looked up, for she was hidden from their view by the old wisteria vine that rambled up one of the pillars on the porch. She suddenly remembered happily—and in excellent time—that her mother had often told them not to burst in upon grown people when they were busily talking unless it was something very important. And after all, funny as the little grey kitten was, he was not really *important*! There was nothing for her to do but sit down on the bottom step of the porch and wait until Grandma and Old-Lady-Witch were through talking. It couldn't possibly be wrong for her to

overhear what they were saying because they didn't mind Patty's listening to them.

"My dear Mrs. Wilton!" Old-Lady-Witch was protesting over something, but she was laughing at the same time.

Cynthia on her bottom step squirmed with excitement. "*My dear* Mrs. Wilton!" Imagine! She was not saying "My dear" as she had said "My dear Mr. Abbott" when she was arguing last week with Daddy. She was saying it as though she really meant it.

"My dear Mrs. Wilton!" Old-Lady-Witch protested again. "But I am years older than you. Indeed I am. *I* am an old lady."

"Age? What is age?" Mrs. Wilton laughed now. "Busy people never have time to grow *old*—they never have time. They have too much to do. Only idle people grow old."

"But think of it, Mrs. Wilton—I was—we were, my husband and I, celebrating a double event the night of that theatre party when we first saw you. It was our twentieth wedding anniversary and our son's eighteenth birthday. It was a gala night. And that night, my dear, was over thirty years ago. Think of it! I had my golden wedding day—several years ago—and quite alone—" Old-Lady-Witch said this last very, very softly and wistfully. Cynthia could scarcely hear her. She wished she could see her face, for she felt that it was no longer witch-like. Cynthia was sure

there must be tears misting Mrs. Carstairs' eyes, for tears were misting her voice.

"But what a lovely night it was!" Old-Lady-Witch went on, after a little tingling pause. "I have never forgotten it. Never for one minute. It was spring, and spring down in the deep south is not like spring anywhere else on earth. It is years now since I have been in New Orleans in the spring—"

"There is no city in the whole country that holds the charm and allure for me that New Orleans has—I have a very warm spot for it in my heart. A romantic, old-world atmosphere—" Mrs. Wilton spoke in what Cynthia called to herself a "faraway" voice.

"I must tell you—" Old-Lady-Witch hurried on, "I must tell you what happened that night. Our boy fell in love with you—he did, indeed! After we left the theatre, we drove back to our home—we were to have a big dance for the young people that we had taken to the theatre. But my boy did not return with us, nor did several of the other young men." Old-Lady-Witch chuckled at the memory. "You never saw *anything*, not anything, like the indignation of a half dozen lovely young ladies who had to sit out the first dances alone. Their beaux had disappeared into the sweet perfumed air of a Louisiana spring night. They had vanished. The young ladies' faces were funny—one could see their struggle—should they stay and *wait* for their wandering beaux? But southern belles

do not wait—! They were tossing their proud little heads and preparing to leave, when the boys dashed in. It seemed they had joined a group of the gay young blades who had followed Beulah Wilton's carriage to her hotel. I believe they were forgiven quite promptly because the young ladies themselves had been completely enthralled with Beulah Wilton. In fact, they wished that they, too, had been under your hotel window to serenade you. They were not jealous, because you stood to them for all the charm and loveliness that women can possess. Their beaux were only saluting beauty, and they had had the good taste to come back to their belles who were also beautiful. I think the girls admired them immensely for their gallantry to a lovely lady—”

“Tell me—” Mrs. Wilton broke in. “Tell me about that serenade. I must get these details straight. I have a young granddaughter who delights in details—and I am afraid I get very hazy and mixed up—”

“And small wonder, considering all that has come your way in tributes! Don't you remember coming out on your balcony?”

“Yes, I do remember! They have such lovely and romantic balconies in New Orleans. I remember that very well. But I have forgotten whether my serenaders had mandolins, guitars or banjos. I am sure Cynthia will want to know. You have no idea the questions she can ask!”

Cynthia was nodding in perfect agreement. She did wish to know! Indeed she did!

"Most certainly they had mandolins, guitars and banjos—what is a serenade without them?" Old-Lady-Witch answered promptly. Then both ladies laughed again in delight.

"I wish you could have heard my boy describe how you looked when you came out on that balcony—"

"Ah! And what would he have thought if he had known I was a widow with two children? Whatever would he have thought if he had known I was over thirty?" And Mrs. Wilton shook her head smilingly.

"He would have brushed your age and your children out of his mind. You were a very beautiful and lovely young girl to him. And he was right. You were very young and very lovely that night. Please remember *I* saw you—and from a front box. You can't laugh that fact away. *I* saw you!"

"Dear me—this is all very heartwarming. I do wish Cynthia could hear you—it sounds so much better than the way I would tell it!"

Cynthia was all atingle. Standing up, she was just about to rush up the steps and tell her grandmother that her wish had been granted, when the conversation continued quickly and Cynthia remembered about interrupting.

"Did your boy ever know that I had two children, and—" Mrs. Wilton asked.

"No, our boy never did. We lost him—before he got through the university—" Mrs. Carstairs' voice broke and Cynthia knew she was far from being Old-Lady-Witch at that minute.

"I lost my only boy, too," Mrs. Wilton said gently.

"But you are a fortunate woman, Mrs. Wilton, having a daughter, her fine husband, all those beautiful grandchildren. And then, too, your days filled with interesting work."

There was a quiet little pause. And Cynthia was glad they had not noticed her, even though she was standing up and could see them plainly. Mrs. Carstairs was looking down into her lap and twirling a flower which she held in one hand. Cynthia recognized the flower at once, for it had come from Mrs. Adams' garden. She looked at Patty. Patty was sitting proudly beside her new friend.

Now Mrs. Carstairs raised her head, and, seeing Cynthia, she smiled pleasantly. Mrs. Wilton, too, turned her head, then held out her hand.

"Come, Cynthia, I want Mrs. Carstairs to know you. This, Mrs. Carstairs, is my daughter's biggest girl—her first born. Cynthia is just like her mother. She is all Morgan, not an Abbott at all."

Mrs. Carstairs held out her hand, her black eyes soft now, and filled with amusement.

"I am very happy to know Cynthia. Yes, I can see the resemblance to her mother. Your mother is a very pretty woman, my dear. I am sorry she is out this afternoon—but at the same time, I am glad to meet your grandmother again and have a good talk with her," she added with smiling emphasis.

"Yes, *again!*" Mrs. Wilton put in. "You see—or rather you hear, darling, Mrs. Carstairs said *again?*"

Cynthia bobbed her head up and down. "Yes, yes, I know, Grandma!"

"You *know!* Dear me, your little granddaughter is an elfin or fairy child—she senses these things without being told! Indeed she does look as though she knew all about us—" Mrs. Carstairs smiled—but looked rather bewildered.

"It was in New Orleans—" Cynthia burst out eagerly. And she was just about to explain—although a gleam in her grandmother's eyes showed that she, at least, thought she understood, when Peter came up on the porch with the little grey kitten in his arms.

"I'm delighted you have arrived, Peter!" Mrs. Wilton said. "I want Mrs. Carstairs to meet you. Mrs. Carstairs, this is my son's little boy. This is the little Peter who has taken the place of my big boy Peter. This Peter has been my companion for many years now. But it is not good for a boy to have only a grandmother as his best pal and friend. I am afraid that too often I have treated him as though he were

grown up. Peter is very happy in this big family of children—in their beloved tower house!”

“I am sure you are happy here, Peter. But you have been very fortunate indeed to have had such a remarkable grandmother for a pal. She will be an inspiration for you all your days.” Mrs. Carstairs smiled warmly. Then she turned from Peter to his grandmother, and back again, her eyes soft with sympathy and understanding. “My, Peter, you have a very pretty little kitten—Why!” she broke off. “Why I do declare, yes, it looks for all the world like one of Mrs. Randolph’s batch. My neighbor’s beautiful angora recently had a litter of kittens which unfortunately took more after their father than their mother. He did not come from the same aristocratic stock.”

There was a tense silence, during which Mrs. Carstairs looked from face to face. Cynthia’s lip was quivering. And Peter was holding the kitten very tight.

“We must confess, Mrs. Carstairs,” Mrs. Wilton explained. “This is not our kitten at all. He has been coming here for days and the children have grown to love him. It has been understood from the first, however, that should his rightful owner appear, they must return him.”

To their surprise, Mrs. Carstairs greeted this information with a gay little laugh. “I can say right now, that Mrs. Randolph will only be too happy to

feel her kitten has a home where he will be appreciated, as I am sure he will be here. I'll tell her that I told you to keep him. Well, I must be saying good-bye."

"You have made us deeply indebted to you today, Mrs. Carstairs," Mrs. Wilton told her in a happy voice. "More indebted than you can know."

"And I am indebted, too," declared Mrs. Carstairs. "Well, goodbye, baby," and she put her hand on Patty's head. "Do you know, that day when I was so worried, this little sweetheart gave me a milk bottle filled with flowers? Mrs. Abbott must be a genius to have grown such flowers so quickly, and during her first summer in the suburbs, at that. I have a hard time with them myself!"

Cynthia opened her mouth to say that the flowers came from Mrs. Adams' garden, but her grandmother caught her eye and gave a little wink, before she could speak. "Let me handle this," she seemed to be saying.

"My daughter does love flowers," Mrs. Wilton told their visitor then. "I am sure that given time, she could have a lovely garden—"

The kitten in her arms, Cynthia watched the car start down the street. Then she flung herself upon her grandmother. "Grandma! Did she mean we can stay in our tower house?"

Mrs. Wilton untwined the arms about her. "Now, my child," she said firmly. Then she shook her head from side to side, in the queer little way she had, her face puckered up with mischief and mystery. "There is a time and a place for all things in this world. And the time for my answer is tonight. The place will be the dinner table when your mother and father are here. Do you perchance think they are less interested than you in the decision? Have you forgotten that your grandmother is an actress? The entire cast must be on the stage—Daddy, Mother, Delia, Peter, Cynthia, David, Judy, Michael and Patty. And Grandmother plumb in the center! Now I must have a little beauty nap."

Without another word, she vanished into the house, returning in a moment to say, "And after dinner, Cynthia my dear, you may make your own grand entrance as Catherine the Great in her Czarina dress."

Cynthia sat down on the top step and gloomily considered the situation. Even the thought of the Czarina dress held no allure at that moment.

"Do you think we've got to move?" she asked her cousin.

Peter sat down beside her. "No, I don't think so. If Old-Lady-Witch has been mean, I think Grandma would have told us right away so that we could get over with it by the time Uncle Tom comes home tonight. Besides, Old-Lady-Witch seemed awfully pleased with herself when she said goodbye."

"That might have been about the kitten," Cynthia suggested unhappily.

Again Peter shook his head. "No, I don't think it was the kitten. But maybe she's only going to let us stay the rest of the summer."

"I don't see why Grandma wouldn't tell," went on Cynthia, resentfully.

"If you'd lived with her as long as I have, you'd know she's got to do things her own way. And in the end, you like it, most of the time," Peter admitted.

When Mother got back, Grandma wouldn't tell her a thing. Then it seemed ages before Daddy came home. And when he kissed Grandma and asked, "Well, what was the verdict," Mrs. Wilton playfully shook her head at him, too. "Don't you wish you knew," she replied. And that was that.

All through the soup course, the children looked at their grandmother with beseeching eyes. Can't you see, dear, dear Grandma, that we can scarcely swallow, we're so worried, their eyes were saying. But Grandma ignored their pleading. She was in no hurry, no hurry at all. Her face was wreathed in smiles. And she sipped her soup from her spoon slowly and deliberately.

When at last Delia had removed the soup plates and was bringing in the meat platter, Mrs. Wilton drew a deep breath and said, "Tom, do you remember my saying that you should put out happy thoughts to

work on Mrs. Carstairs, the owner of this house?"

"I most certainly do! And you said if I did, the Old-Lady-Witch would get big-hearted and generous. Well?"

Mrs. Wilton looked around the table, as if to make sure everyone was listening. They were!

"The most amazing thing happened this afternoon, the one thing I couldn't have predicted," she said. "When Mrs. Carstairs came—"

Delia, having deposited the meat platter, was standing beside Mrs. Abbott's chair. "Why, Delia," Mrs. Wilton now said gently and approvingly, "you haven't brought the corn fritters. If there is one thing I am fond of, it is corn fritters," she informed her tense audience, with a sparkling smile, "made just the way Delia cooks them with—"

"Hang corn fritters!" Mr. Abbott exploded.

"Please, Mother darling." It was Mrs. Abbott, her eyes anxious, for all that she knew her mother's ways so well.

"Very well. I might as well tell you now, Tom. Your beautiful thoughts were of no use whatever."

"But what did she say, Grandma?" asked Cynthia.

"She said that she simply must get rid of all worry about her property, including this house. She wants to go home. She hasn't been back to New Orleans for years and she is lonely and homesick for it. I must say I don't blame her. How well I remember—"

"Oh, Grandma, p-l-e-a-s-e!" It was Peter now, leaning forward over the table, worried and anxious.

"Yes, she must have no worries about this property and the other houses that came to her due to some man's wicked manipulations. She never wanted any of it. She is a very old lady. Older than her years . . ."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mr. Abbott. "What a predicament!"

"No predicament at all, my son. None at all," replied Mrs. Wilton serenely.

"So—!" And Mr. Abbott leaned back in his chair, a glint of amusement flashing into his eyes. Bother this actress business! Mother had actually had him worried. "They lived happily ever after in the tower house!"

Mrs. Wilton flourished her napkin in his direction. "How did you ever guess!"

Cynthia jumped up from her place and nearly collided with Delia as she ran around the table to kiss her grandmother. Peter followed after, then David and Judy and Michael, and such a babble and hubbub of joy filled the dining room that at length Mrs. Abbott put her hands to her ears. But she did not protest. She was much too happy.

"Whew!" exclaimed Mr. Abbott when the hubbub had begun to die down. "Leave it to Mother to

work up a climax. But please, p-l-e-a-s-e, Mother, begin at the beginning and make sense of it."

The children surged back to their places, and Mrs. Wilton smilingly waited for silence. It was granted her, as soon as it was physically possible—complete, breathless, eager silence.

"Yes, you may stay in this house you love so much, just as long as ever you wish," she told him. "Mrs. Carstairs would never, never dream of causing the slightest hurt to a lovely baby girl like our engaging small Patty, nor to her grandmother, Beulah Wilton, who was once, long ago, the toast of her beloved home city, New Orleans!"

"She was right in calling you a great actress, my dear Beulah Wilton," broke in Mr. Abbott. "Great—past, present and future, especially the present."

Mrs. Wilton bowed. "She recognized me, for all that it's been years since she saw me there. And when I told her what it meant to me to have my adored family here in this perfect place, and to have it to come to when I am tired of hotel rooms, she had only one answer. Of course," Mrs. Wilton added with her flashing smile, "I did say we could manage somewhat more rent."

"Mother, you didn't!"

"It is only right and just for me to pay the margin, daughter," went on Mrs. Wilton. "If I had Peter with

me, his rooms at hotels would cost even more than I offered her. And I pointed out to her, too, that what with my son-in-law taking such an interest in the place, we would be improving it all the time."

"Thermometers certainly are most decorative," murmured Mrs. Abbott.

"And him making the rabbit run showed what he can do," commented Delia, in smiling sarcasm.

"Can we live here in the country for the rest of our lives, Grandma dear," asked Judy, who wished to be sure that she understood, what with all the queer words everyone was using.

"Yes, my lamb, you may," smiled her grandmother. "Here in the country in the happy tower house for the rest of your lives."

After dinner, Cynthia and Peter were sitting side by side on the top step of the porch. Just as soon as Mr. and Mrs. Abbott and Mrs. Wilton finished talking about Mrs. Carstairs, Grandma was going to unpack everything in her theatrical trunk.

"We'll all dress up gorgeously," Grandma had said. "Including Delia. Never mind the dishes, Delia. And then we'll have a parade all around the house—perhaps even a performance. I'm going to be Little Buttercup, and I'd love to sing for you!"

Patty and Judy and Michael and David had rushed to wait for Grandma on the attic stairs. But Cynthia, the little grey kitten in her arms, had gone outside

into the quietness of the twilight. She was so happy, she wished to be alone for a little while—to think about it. But she did not mind when Peter joined her. She could tell by the expression on his face that he felt just as she did.

Suddenly, the little grey kitten began to purr loudly.

At the sound, Cynthia turned to Peter. "Peter! We've been so busy and so worried, we haven't even named him yet. What shall we call him?"

Peter wrinkled his forehead. "How about—how about—"

"Oh, I know!" Cynthia cried. "I know. Let's call him Lucky. We're lucky that he came to us. He's lucky he's found a nice home with so many nice children to look after him and play with. And this is the luckiest day of our lives because we don't have to move away from our tower house."

Mr. Abbott came out onto the porch then, and leaning over, picked up the kitten.

"His name's Lucky," Cynthia told him. "Peter and I just decided."

Mr. Abbott scratched Lucky under his chin. Then he held up the kitten's furry tail and said as he touched its tip, "This is the end of Lucky's tail and our lucky tale."

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